

1 March 3, 2010

Senator Don DeFronzo
Representative Antonio Guerrero
Co-Chairs, Senate Transportation Committee
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: SB 345: AN ACT AUTHORIZING MUNICIPALITIES TO CONDUCT A PILOT PROGRAM FOR THE USE OF AUTOMATED TRAFFIC CONTROL SIGNAL ENFORCEMENT DEVICES AT CERTAIN INTERSECTIONS.

Honorable Senator DeFronzo, Honorable Representative Guerrero, and members of the Transportation Committee:

My name is Rob Rocke and I am writing to urge your support for the passage of automatic red light enforcement enabling legislation in Connecticut. I have been a resident of New Haven's East Rock neighborhood for almost fifteen years. I am an alumnus of the Yale Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, and currently work for Yale University's Information Technology department. I do not drive to work, but rather commute to work either by biking or walking. My job responsibilities also necessitate that I travel to many different locations around Yale's campus on a daily basis. This, too, I do by foot and bicycle. I am therefore particularly sensitive to the public safety concerns of unsafe streets. Those experiences led me to join New Haven's Elm City Cycling, the premier bicycling/pedestrian advocacy group in town, and I have been an active member of that group for many years. In fact, I currently sit on the board of Elm City Cycling.

The streets I navigate day-to-day have become like the proverbial "Wild West," and of all the behaviors I witness, motor vehicle drivers running red lights is one of the more blatant violations. It is also one of the most life-threatening. I've regularly counted one, two, and sometimes even three cars at an intersection ignoring a red light and blowing through the intersection as if it's their right to do so. This is not a case of a close call. It's as if it's a law these driver don't think they have to obey. Or maybe it's just that past experience has conditioned these drivers into thinking that there is no consequence for their illegal action.

Running red lights is clearly dangerous, and most certainly illegal. Yet there are simply not enough police officers to cover every intersection at every time of day. Especially in this time of decreasing budgets, increasing cost-consciousness, and the competing demands placed on officers' time, I think now is the perfect time to embrace the new red light camera technology available today to help the police enforce the laws on our books, especially when there's such a direct implication for an increase in public safety.

I've been a strong supporter of these red light cameras as a law-enforcement device for many years, and I've heard many of the privacy rights arguments against their use. I've come to conclude that there is a general fear of technology at play, where people misunderstand what the technology actually does. At the same time, I think folks naively underplay how much legal

“privacy-compromising” technology is already in use: take the imagery available from Google Earth, or the personal information we all give away on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

I am quite literally a “card-carrying” member of the ACLU. Privacy rights is an issue that I care about as much as I care about bicyclist and pedestrian safety, and yet I see no compelling contradiction between the two. Driving motor vehicles is something we do in the public arena. Our behavior is visible for all to see. These cameras aren’t invading the sanctity of activities we’re performing alone in the privacy of our own homes. There is nothing “private” per-se in choosing to participate in our public roadway system by becoming a licensed driver, and claims of privacy shouldn’t be a way to hide behind illegal behavior expressed in that sphere.

So yes, I know much fear is spread about these imagined “Big-Brother” cameras, but please look at the photos the camera actually takes: a wide shot of the vehicle in the intersection running the red light with no details of the driver or passenger(s), as well as a close-up shot of the vehicle’s license plate. Municipal budgets are shrinking, local police departments’ budgets are shrinking, and the police themselves admit that there is an inherent danger for them to do on-site traffic enforcement at certain high-profile intersections. Furthermore, red-light running is so prevalent that the police simply can’t be everywhere all the time. Given this reality, I think Connecticut owes its citizens a test-implementation of these cameras as a law enforcement device with relevant metrics taken before, during, and after such a test deployment. It seems to me this is the most objective way to know if they work, how effective they may be in changing driver behavior, and what privacy and other issues arise.

Additionally, I think that the revenue generated from the tickets issued using this new red light camera technology should be used exclusively for projects that directly increase traffic safety, whether that be engineering projects or educational campaigns. (I know a “three-foot passing zone” for motor vehicles passing bicyclists is now law, but I don’t think passage of that excellent piece of legislation was ever really publicized statewide in a meaningful way.)

I believe that the anticipated decrease in cars running red lights as a result of red light cameras being used as a traffic enforcement device will have the direct effect of increasing public safety. This in turn will have a positive impact on the overall quality of life in communities throughout our great state. With that in mind, I would like to offer my **enthusiastic** support for this piece of legislation, and I urge you to do the same.

Thank you,

Rob Rocke
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