

Testimony of
Mark Abraham
Connecticut Livable Streets Campaign
Transportation Committee
February 14, 2011
In support of

*Proposed S.B. No. 706 AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPAL INTERSECTION SAFETY SYSTEMS.

*Proposed S.B. No. 822 AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE USE OF PHOTOGRAPHIC TRAFFIC ENFORCEMENT TECHNOLOGY.

*Proposed H.B. No. 6178 AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE USE OF TRAFFIC CAMERAS BY MUNICIPALITIES.

*Proposed H.B. No. 6179 AN ACT AUTHORIZING MUNICIPALITIES TO OPERATE INTERSECTION SAFETY CAMERA SYSTEMS.

Senator Maynard, Representative Guerrera and members of the Transportation Committee:

I am Mark Abraham, a resident of New Haven for the past 13 years and a representative of the Connecticut Livable Streets Campaign. I am here to testify in support of a number of bills that will allow a municipal option for the installation and operation of Intersection Safety Cameras. I am in support of each of the 4 proposed bills above. These pieces of legislation also find unanimous support among the steering committee of the Connecticut Livable Streets Campaign, and our critical to our state's long-term economic competitiveness.

Red light violations are common and serious in New Haven and other towns within the region. On average, I witness drivers running red lights several times per day. My window looks over a busy intersection and I can see drivers running them at almost every cycle. Red light running is particularly common at peak travel times, which is precisely when it presents the most risk to other road users.

Although violations may seem trivial to those breaking the law, the consequences of red light violations are extremely serious. Crashes caused by red light running are far more likely to cause an injury than those caused by other types of violations. They also indirectly create a significant cost burden for all citizens, in the form of high insurance, property recovery and medical costs. According to another study released this February and reported in the Washington Post on February 1, 2011:

The 2.2 million intersection crashes recorded in 2009 made up about 41 percent of all accidents. They resulted in 81,112 serious injuries and 7,358 deaths. Police established red-light running as the cause of 676 deaths and 113,000 injuries. The vast majority of the people who died - 64 percent - were not driving the vehicle that ran the light. They were passengers, other drivers, pedestrians and cyclists.

The economies of urban areas such as New Haven and Hamden, where I do the majority of my shopping, rely on safe pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular travel. While suburban retail areas may depend more on longer trips along high speed roads and highways, most shopping trips in New Haven involve short trips to a nearby neighborhood district. The fear of drivers running red lights discourages people from making these kinds of trips on a daily basis, which severely affects local retail sales. In addition, the majority of New Haven residents do not drive in a private automobile to work every day, indicating that many trips to work are short in nature and involve means of transportation (such as buses, walking, bicycling, skateboarding, and wheelchair use) that place workers at a higher risk when confronted with drivers who are speeding or running red light signals. Based on my conversations with numerous individuals in

neighborhoods across New Haven, the perceived lack of safe streets also encourages many people to drive more, rather than walk or bike, resulting in significant household expenses that might be better directed towards education, health care and other basic needs. **In other words, when it comes to people running red lights, the perception of safety is at least as important as the safety issue itself.** Although traffic safety problems cause numerous deaths and injuries, they also have significant indirect impacts on public health, education, community involvement, household savings, and economic development.

As I'm sure others will testify (**for example, the study I cited above showed a 26% decline in fatalities over five years at camera-equipped sites**), red light cameras have been shown to be extremely effective at modifying driver behavior. Increased driver compliance rates have been found not just at camera-equipped sites, but at non-equipped intersections as well. In some cases, red light violations have dropped by 90 percent or more. Additionally, the use of such cameras could help free up law enforcement resources for other quality of life issues, possibly providing significant relief to taxpayers.

Perhaps most importantly from a taxpayer's perspective in the long term, it has become clear that having walkable streets is absolutely crucial to attracting a young, entrepreneurial workforce. Automobile use continues to drop across the world for various economic, cultural and environmental reasons. The hiring and retention of creative, productive workers, particularly those who have entered the labor force in the past 10-15 years, is a crucial issue in Connecticut, for demographic reasons that the committee is aware of, **and is directly linked to having vibrant urban places.** Anecdotally speaking, I have worked for several small for-profit corporations which focus on development in Connecticut cities, and traffic safety is constantly cited as a concern by our employees. The perceived and actual lack of safe streets has directly prevented some of our younger and middle-aged employees from walking or biking to work on a daily basis, which means that they are less likely to enjoy living and working in an urban area.

The New Haven Safe Streets Coalition, whose petition was signed by over 2,000 city residents, over 30 elected officials, all 12 of New Haven's Community Management Teams and dozens of other local and state advocacy groups, has demonstrated that there is significant regional interest in improved traffic safety. The petition called for a 90% reduction in traffic injuries and fatalities by 2015 - a goal that we must meet, given that these types of injuries are completely preventable. Given the other issues of social equity involved, such as equal access to transportation resources, not do so is simply unethical. Although a multi-pronged approach is urgently needed, the steering committee members of the CT Livable Streets Coalition believe that the coalition's stated goal of a 90% reduction in injuries would only be possible with higher levels of enforcement, including red light cameras.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of Intersection Safety Cameras. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Best regards,

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