

## TESTIMONY CONCERNING HB-5458

Submitted by Christina Spiesel March 12, 2012

I have come to testify today as an individual representing no organization and I have no economic interest in this legislation. I am, as a citizen, gravely concerned about it. People advocate its fast track passage -- legislators in whose districts I reside. I have great respect for them. In this matter, however, they, and we, have been proceeding too quickly with inadequate information to make good decisions when a great deal of money is involved and citizens' safety and rights to privacy and non-interference are on the line as well.

- The claim is that "red-light cameras" are intended to promote safety. That is not their track record in other cities. In fact, in some cities there has been a dramatic increase in fatalities due to increased rear end collisions.<sup>i</sup>
- The claim is that an independent study has shown overwhelming support for these installations among the people of Connecticut. The study that makes this claim is suspect, having been carried out by the National Coalition for Safer Roads which is a non-profit, but a non-profit with governance that overlaps with the American Traffic Solutions Corporation, the very entity that wants lucrative contracts from larger municipalities here in Connecticut.<sup>ii</sup> We have an obligation to explore this conflict of interest.
- Because of fast tracking, I cannot believe that any adequate study has been done regarding the economics of this plan to install cameras. Such a study should include the actual cost of the technology, the costs of each installation in terms of monthly charges, yearly costs, maintenance charges, fees for cancelling the contracts, etc. It is quite possible that municipalities will sink money into these devices that they won't be earning back. Such a situation is an invitation to corruption where the system gets tweaked to catch more people not because they are law breakers but because the system needs money.
- There are larger liberty issues as well. HB 54-58 proposes that camera tickets be civil not criminal penalties. In California, a judge decided that with the civil penalties people don't actually have to pay these tickets – they are free to ignore them.<sup>iii</sup> But once issued, even if ignored, they could have other, more damaging consequences. It is not hard to imagine that if insurance companies are either given the information or find that the ticket has been issued, they may well use it as an excuse to raise their rates thereby harming people financially in a much larger way. Further, these tickets could make it much harder for Zip cars and groups organizing to share cars; both kinds of programs are intended to relieve congestion and increase fuel efficiency, goals presumably shared by those who are concerned for traffic safety and livable cities. The insurance industry is already involved: a much criticized study by an insurance group, The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, is one of the studies used to advocate for this technology.<sup>iv</sup>
- I am very concerned about the interaction between the "red-light cameras" HB54-58 and the equally flawed plan to install a camera surveillance system HB-5391 that would provide real-time tracking of all vehicles in the state. The one bill risks making insurance unaffordable thereby we will have drivers are then unable to maintain registration of their cars because they cannot afford to insure them. With our wholly inadequate public transportation system, people will potentially lose their jobs for lack of transportation and we will have engendered a whole host of additional social problems that never should have been created in the first place.

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- Finally, these technologies generate a great deal of data, most of it having real value in the data markets. License plates lead to registrations and registrations contain names, addresses, the make and model of the car being registered. Combined with other data, our digital dossiers get ever thicker and more detailed. Red-light cameras can track where people go and inferences are made (often uncritically) about what the cars' trails mean. In some respects the technological solutions offered in these bills can be understood to constitute warrantless wiretapping – or more precisely, warrantless GPS tracking. The State ought not to make its citizens vulnerable in these ways. We have a right to privacy, to not be intruded on every time we leave our homes, and not to have those trips become part of some dossier.

The proposed technologies probably won't actually accomplish the social goals that we are asked to believe they will accomplish – making our roads safer for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers in general. There are other, much less expensive and less intrusive means to do this. Meanwhile, I cannot urge you more strongly to find out the real costs, find out the histories of use from other communities, look more closely at the statistics that compare road safety in Connecticut to other states to see what kind of a problem we actually have. Let us make a more considered decision after a thorough, independent, and professional study carried out by a group that has no financial interest in what it will find. That is the least you can do when basic rights and fairness are in the balance.

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Some references:

<sup>i</sup> <http://www.atsol.com/about-us.html>; <http://stormkingstrategies.com/news/4-13-10/>; <http://stormkingstrategies.com/news/4-13-10/>; <http://www.stamfordadvocate.com/news/article/Questions-arise-as-state-considers-red-light-3361210.php#ixzz1oSrmYIBY>; <http://www.thenewspaper.com/news/30/3009.asp>; <http://www.thenewspaper.com/rlc/docs/05-vdot.pdf>; <http://www.thenewspaper.com/rlc/docs/05-vdot.pdf>; <sup>i</sup> <http://ncrsafety.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Effectiveness-of-Red-Light-Cameras.pdf>; <http://ncrsafety.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Effectiveness-of-Red-Light-Cameras.pdf>; <http://www.thenewspaper.com/news/30/3055.asp>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.thenewspaper.com/news/35/3585.asp>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://articles.latimes.com/print/2011/jul27/local/la-me-0727-red-light-cameras-20110727>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.stamfordadvocate.com/news/article/Questions-arise-as-state-considers-red-light-3361210.php#ixzz1oSr1bpRG>