

Date: March 12, 20012

From: Paulette Cohen

To: Transportation Committee

Re: Why I Oppose H.B. No. 5458 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING
MUNICIPAL AUTOMATED TRAFFIC ENFORCEMENT SAFETY DEVICES AT
CERTAIN INTERSECTIONS.

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

My name is Paulette Cohen and I have lived in New Haven Connecticut for just short of 30 years. I'm here to speak today about the serious privacy issues raised by the use of red light traffic cameras. But I find I am unable to do that unless I speak first about traffic safety and these cameras.

I have no doubt that most of the people testifying today, many from New Haven, sincerely believe that red light cameras will prevent serious accidents and make their cities safer. In just the last few months in New Haven I have seen a slew of pro red light camera emails, as well as media reports of press conferences/demonstrations called to encourage support of red light cameras. The pattern is always the same. First there is talk about serious accidents at specific intersections, and then talk about the urgent need to install red light cameras to improve traffic safety. There is no intermediate step where someone explains that the accident being discussed was caused by running a red light, yet I feel like I'm expected to reach that conclusion. I call this asserting cause and effect by juxtaposition, and I am wary of this type of rhetorical device because it is a vehicle for the type of faulty reasoning that persuaded Congress to vote for the invasion of Iraq.

Last week I decided that if I wanted to testify about the intersection of privacy rights and traffic safety I should at least know how many of the accidents that occurred in New Haven during the last year or two were caused by drivers running red lights. I planned to subtract out the number of drivers who ran red lights while they were drunk, on drugs, or fleeing from police—in other words drivers who wouldn't have been deterred by a red light camera--so I could get a clear picture of the

As for now, there is no compelling reason to pass legislation to enable unproven technologies. It is not persuasive to say that the bill has been raised in some form every year for seven or eight years and it is now time to pass it. This argument only points to the amount of money red light camera companies have spent on lobbying for this legislation every year.

For now, the best way to decrease traffic accidents is tried and true methods such as speed bumps, 4-way red lights when a light turns from green to red, the ugly but effective pop-up screens that display your speed in enormous numerals, minute increases in the length of yellow lights, clear signage and clearing visual obstructions. Better public transportation would help even more. And none of these remedies raise privacy or any other civil liberties concerns.

Paulette Cohen