

WRITTEN TESTIMONY ON AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPAL  
AUTOMATED TRAFFIC ENFORCEMENT SAFETY DEVICES AT  
CERTAIN INTERSECTIONS  
Raised Bill No. 5458

March 12, 2012

Good morning Senator Maynard, Representative Guerrero and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee. My name is Sheldon Wishnick. I am a volunteer activist with the National Motorists Association and I am here to testify about Raised Bill No. 5458, An Act Concerning Municipal Automated Traffic Enforcement Safety Devices at Certain Intersections.

On behalf of the National Motorists Association and our members in Connecticut, I urge you to oppose Raised Bill 5458. Do not allow Connecticut to join the growing list of states that have experimented with cameras in the hope of reducing traffic accidents. In too many cases, instead of preventing them, these cameras have led to an increase in accidents. It is now well known that a dangerous intersection can only be made safer through the use of proven engineering solutions. Instead of scientifically studying and resolving the problem, some municipalities are drawn to camera manufacturers who promise cash returns with enhanced safety.

Accidents due to red light violations became an issue only when red light cameras became available. Before that, national statistics indicated 100-200 deaths yearly due to this issue. Hardly a problem when compared to the tens of thousands of deaths annually attributed to inattentive and impaired drivers and speeding.

Upon review, most of these newly classified "red light accidents" were found to be due to intersection design problems, such as poor line of sight and insufficient yellow times, rather than deliberate violations. The solution might be as simple as trimming back tree branches or adjusting the duration of the yellow light to match the speed of traffic. No camera operation would improve this situation. Furthermore, the vast majority of tickets are typically issued to a vehicle not coming to a complete stop exactly on the white line before turning right. Although this kind of violation almost never causes accidents, it is the major ticket generator.

Ticket cameras are profitable and have become a major item in several cities budgets, such as Washington DC and New York City. If cameras actually solved the problem of red light running there would be a swift reduction in violators ticketed. Instead, the camera manufacturers point to mounting fines as evidence that the program is working.

Several years ago, the National Motorists Association has issued a \$10,000 challenge to any municipality considering the installation of red light cameras. They will guarantee a 50% reduction in any red light violations after the community applies our engineering based solutions to any problem intersection. If the reduction is not achieved, the municipality will be paid \$10,000 to be used on any traffic safety program. To date no one has accepted the challenge.

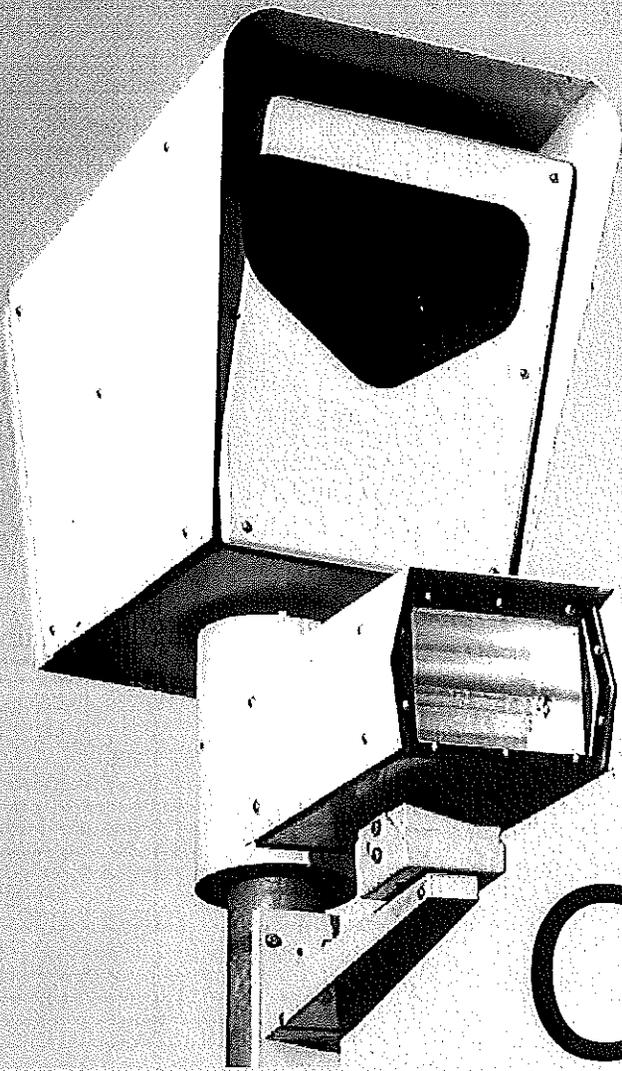
Camera manufacturers (or committees formed by the camera manufacturers) support their safety claims by funding studies that produce the intended results. The only favorable study not involving the manufacturers was by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. This organization is funded by major insurance companies who stand to gain when more tickets issued translates into higher premium revenues. This is also the same organization that predicted carnage on our highways and an additional 6,400 deaths annually if our National Speed Limit of 55 were to be repealed. In fact the death rate on our highways continues to decrease years after 55 was abolished.

Using selected statistics to prove a pre-ordained conclusion is easy to accomplish. During the IIHS study period of 2004 to 2008 the fatal accident rate per million miles driven in the United States dropped from 1.44 to 1.26. Fatal accidents also dropped in the red light camera cities studied. The IIHS attributed the full amount of this decrease to the presence of red-light cameras, even counting improvements at intersections where no cameras were present.

On the other side of this issue are universities and other truly independent studies from AAA Michigan, North Carolina A+T State University, Virginia Department of Transportation and the Transportation Research Board. None of these studies found the cameras to be effective, often in fact there were increased accidents at these intersections. Rear end accidents, in particular, almost always increased in the presence of these devices as drivers stop abruptly to avoid a ticket. An executive summary of the most recent study from the Public Interest Research Group are attached.

Hiring a third party to enforce the law with payment dependent upon the number of violations issued produces a basic conflict of interest. I don't think many people would support paying police a cash commission based upon the traffic fines generated by tickets they wrote, yet we propose the same thing with a third party vendor.

Sheldon Wishnick, Activist  
National Motorists Association  
94 Stagecoach Lane  
Newington, CT 06111  
860.666.1006



# Caution:

## Red Light Cameras Ahead

*The Risks of Privatizing Traffic Law Enforcement and How to Protect the Public*

**U.S. PIRG**  
Education Fund

# Executive Summary

**P**rivatized traffic law enforcement systems are spreading rapidly across the United States. As many as 700 local jurisdictions have entered into deals with for-profit companies to install camera systems at intersections and along roadways to encourage drivers to obey traffic signals and follow speed limits.

Local contracting for automated traffic enforcement systems may sometimes be a useful tool for keeping drivers and pedestrians safe. But when private firms and municipalities consider revenues first, and safety second, the public interest is threatened.

Before pursuing a camera system contract, local governments should heed the advice of the Federal Highway Administration and first investigate traffic engineering solutions for problem intersections or roadways. If officials decide that private enforcement systems are appropriate, they should avoid deals that constrain future decisions related to protecting safety. Privatized traffic law enforcement should be used solely as a tool for enhancing traffic safety—not as a cash cow for municipalities or private firms.

## **Privatized traffic law enforcement systems are spreading rapidly across the United States.**

- According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, about half of U.S. states have authorized the use of red-light cameras. Our compilation of industry listings shows that approximately 693 local governments and authorities have active red-light cameras, or are in the process of installing them, as of September 2011. Another 92 have contracts for automated speed limit enforcement cameras. Altogether, these jurisdictions are home to more than 60 million people, or about one in five Americans.
- These camera systems automatically detect violations of traffic laws, take photos of the offending vehicles, and identify license plates. Typically, vendors issue tickets, which must be approved by local authorities, and deliver them by mail to the registered owner of the vehicle.

- Privatized traffic enforcement is part of a larger trend of local governments outsourcing the management of toll roads, parking meters, water and sewer assets, and sometimes even public safety services such as fire protection to private firms.

**Contracts between private camera vendors and cities can include payment incentives that put profit above traffic safety.**

- The most problematic contracts require cities to share revenue with the camera vendor on a per-ticket basis or through other formulas as a percentage of revenue. In other words, the more tickets a camera system issues, the more profit the vendor collects. For example, Suffolk County, New York, diverts half of the revenue from its red-light camera program to camera vendor Affiliated Computer Services.
- Conditional “cost-neutral” contracts also contain provisions that link payments to the number of tickets issued, although payments are capped. Under these contracts, cities pay a monthly fee to a camera vendor. In the event that ticket revenues fail to cover the vendor fee in any given month, however, cities may delay payment—giving vendors an incentive to ensure a minimum level of citations are issued.

**Privatized traffic enforcement system contracts that limit government discretion to set and enforce traffic regulations put the public at risk.** For example:

- *Yellow Light Duration.* When traffic engineers lengthen a yellow signal, it gives drivers more time to react to the signal change, which tends to reduce

the number of red-light violations. However, some contracts, including those in the California cities of Bell Gardens, Citrus Heights, Corona and Hawthorne, potentially impose financial penalties on the city if traffic engineers extend the length of the yellow light at intersections with red-light cameras, which would reduce the number of tickets the systems can issue.

- *Right on Red Enforcement.* Law enforcement agencies in different cities choose which types of violations to prioritize in the name of public safety, including whether or not to ticket motorists who make a “rolling stop” rather than a complete stop behind the line before turning right on a red light. However, some contracts require municipalities to strictly issue tickets on all right turns that do not first come to a complete stop, or enable vendors to impose financial penalties on cities that choose to alter their enforcement standards—including the contracts that Ventura and Napa Valley, California have with camera vendor Redflex.
- *Ticket Quotas.* Some contracts include language that could penalize municipalities if they do not approve enough tickets—effectively setting a ticket quota and undermining the authority of local officials to decide which violations warrant citations. For example, Walnut, California signed a contract with Redflex that raises the possibility of a financial penalty if the city waives more than 10 percent of the potential violations identified by the private camera system. Other contracts give camera vendors the ability to veto proposed camera locations, sometimes referring to a minimum ticket number or revenue requirement.