



Connecticut State Conference of NAACP Branches

2074 Park Street · Hartford, CT 06106

Office: 860-523-9962 Fax: 860-523-9934

Email: ctnaacp2@sbcglobal.net

Testimony in Opposition to Red Light Cameras, Senate Bill No. 634, House Bill No. 5554 and House Bill No. 6056

Senator Maynard, Representative Guerrero, members of the Transportation Committee, my name is Abdul-Shahid Muhammad Ansari. I'm president of the Greater Hartford NAACP and political action chair of the Connecticut State Conference of NAACP Branches. I wish to convey our opposition to any legislation permitting red light cameras in Connecticut's cities, including Senate Bill 634, House Bill 5554 and House Bill 6056.

Red light cameras are bad public policy, and they are particularly bad for racial minorities. The legislation before you today would limit red light cameras to municipalities of more than 48,000 or more than 30,000 population, directing enforcement to the places where African American and Latino people are most likely to live and drive. You may argue that cameras can't racially profile, but their placement can. It's simple. If you put them where minorities drive, minorities will get the tickets. And even if Connecticut law didn't encourage this kind of geographical racial profiling, the laws of economics would. Municipalities and camera companies will put the cameras at high-volume intersections where they will generate the most revenue. And that will be in cities, where minority populations are greatest.

Even if red light cameras were evenly distributed, they would create an unequal financial burden. Any flat fee or fine, whether for \$5 or \$500, harms the poor more than it harms the rich. A police officer may use his or her discretion to avoid giving a poor, working man or woman a ticket for a minor traffic infraction that would confiscate half a paycheck. But a camera can't. In addition, poor people can't afford lawyers to fight tickets and often have difficulty taking time off from work to challenge a ticket themselves. Knowing what we do about the shortcomings of red light camera technology, this is an unreasonable burden. It's taxation by citation, and in a regressive form that punishes the poor.

There is also the issue of insurance. Urban car owners already face significantly higher auto insurance rates than those who live in the country and the suburbs. What is to prevent insurance companies from using red light camera tickets, which will be public information, from raising individual rates even higher? And even if they don't raise rates on an individual basis, higher traffic violation rates will raise community insurance ratings. That means every car owner in the city will pay.

We all know that there's a great deal of money at stake in red light traffic cameras. A single camera can generate more than \$100,000 in revenue in a single year, and some municipal camera networks have generated hundreds of millions of dollars over many years. But please think about where that money comes from and where it goes. In many cases, it comes from drivers responsible for only the most minor infractions, including right turns where they didn't quite come to a total stop. And as I've pointed out, drivers passing through monitored intersections are more likely to be poor or minority drivers who are already singled out for more traffic stops based solely on their skin color. The money is going, largely, to companies that operate for profit, not for public safety or fairness or sound public policy, no matter how much they insist otherwise.

The argument that red light cameras protect urban communities from reckless drivers is unconvincing. Different studies have provided conflicting results and the research funded by red light camera companies and the insurance industry are far more likely to show safety benefits than other studies. Many studies find an increase in rear-end crashes as drivers slam on the brakes to avoid a ticket. If you want to make city intersections safer, engineer them for maximum safety with longer yellow lights, all-red intervals, proper sight lines and clear pavement markings.

We know from experience that red light cameras have not been welcomed by minority communities. In 2011, voters in minority neighborhoods of Houston provided the strongest support for a successful ballot initiative to remove red light cameras in that city. In 2008, the NAACP of Cincinnati forced a referendum that banned red light cameras. And the burden of red light cameras on minority drivers in Miami has spurred a statewide movement to repeal enabling legislation in Florida.

I respectfully ask you to consider the inherent unfairness of red light cameras and the unequal impact on minority communities and to reject this legislation.

