Planning and Development Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
March 3, 2023

Testimony in Support of HB 5353: An Act Concerning Certain Municipal Traffic Authorities

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I want to voice my support for HB 5353 regarding traffic authorities and I applaud the Hamden delegation for sponsoring this bill.

The statute to which this bill makes alteration was drafted in 1949. That statute is convoluted, confusing, antiquated, and counterproductive to the State Plan of Conservation and Development and the "Vision Zero" goals enacted in Public Act 21-28.

In New Haven we have many highly qualified police commissioners including former State Rep. (and Judiciary Committee co-chairman) Mike Lawlor, renowned criminologists and law professors at Yale, former police chiefs, etc. These are bona fide experts in criminal justice. They are not, by their own admission, experts in transportation planning, traffic engineering, road safety assessment, or the content of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. Not a single commissioner has attended a technical assistance training on traffic safety at the Connecticut Transportation Institute; not a single one has ever answered a question on traffic safety at his or her confirmation hearing, for the simple reason that the Police Commission's auxiliary role as a Local Traffic Authority is essentially, and understandably, an afterthought.

Serving on the Police Commission in a community like New Haven is a critically important function that should be laser-focused on the hiring and promotion of good police officers and the firing of bad ones. I cannot speak for all towns but in New Haven the Police Commission has neither the time nor the attention to be reasonably expected to pass informed judgment on the suitability of a bike lane on Whitney Avenue or the lowering of the speed limit on Elm Street (which in New Haven are common Traffic Authority agenda items). State law should be encouraging municipalities with sufficient interest and adequate means to establish independent traffic authorities comprised of members with genuine subject matter expertise, not discouraging or preventing that by requiring in a profoundly convoluted and antiquated statute that widely divergent responsibilities be placed under the purview of a single decision-making body. This is
especially true at a time when we are experiencing an epidemic of traffic violence and fatalities unprecedented in the last 30 years.

**Conclusion and Recommendation for Modification**

I would urge the committee to not only approve this very simple bill directly benefiting Hamden and New Haven, but also to enact minimal training requirements for traffic authority commissioners that would benefit all communities in our state.

Legislation to that effect (HB 5988) has been introduced in the Transportation Committee -- perhaps the language could be combined with this bill because they are obviously complementary.

A further suggestion is that the arbitrary cut-off of 50,000 be removed from the language of the bill. Any municipality with sufficient interest and adequate means should be permitted to establish an independent traffic authority, subject to review and approval of the Office of State Traffic Administration.