27 February 2023

Dear Chairs, Ranking Members, Vice Chairs, and Members of the Planning and Development Committee,

Thank you for considering my strong support for H.B. No. 5353, An Act Concerning Certain Municipal Traffic Authorities. This bill will advance Connecticut’s Vision Zero goal and make our streets safer for all road users. Connecticut, and New Haven where I live, are experiencing an epidemic of traffic violence. More than one person a day was killed in traffic violence in the state last year, which is unacceptable. Again, this bill would help address this situation.

Currently the state’s definition of Traffic Authority (Chapter 249, Sec. 14-297 (6)) is hard to decipher and so it is not clear if a municipality with a police commission is required to house its traffic authority (TA) in the police commission.

This bill would helpfully make it clear that municipalities with populations of 50,000 or more do not have to house their TA in the police commission. Rather, it demonstrates they are authorized to establish traffic authorities that are independent of the municipal board of police commissioners or other municipal official or body.

In New Haven, as in many other municipalities, the TA is housed in the Police Commission. The Police Commission is not a logical location for a TA because police commissions have lots of things to worry about, and the design of our streets is not their top priority. They also do not have expertise in traffic safety infrastructure. Candidates for police commission are selected for their expertise and experience in traditional policing issues; when our Board of Alders vets them, they ask questions related to policing, not to road infrastructure design.

Given the critical role road design plays in traffic safety, we, and other large municipalities, need a TA with expertise in street infrastructure design. It is also important that users of all modalities are represented in the TA, with an emphasis on underrepresented and vulnerable road users (bus and train riders, wheelchair and assistive device users, pedestrians, bike riders, and drivers). This would ensure that those making key decisions about improvements to our streets have direct personal and professional expertise and/or investment in safety, equity, and sustainability.

The timing of this bill is helpful to New Haven. Safe streets advocates seek to amend our Charter to establish an independent TA. This bill would make clear that New Haven is empowered to make this change.

Please pass this bill to help reduce the alarming increase in traffic fatalities and injuries in Connecticut, and bolster the state’s commitment to Vision Zero,

Sincerely,

Abigail Roth
New Haven, CT