Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill No. 634 and House Bills No. 5554 and No. 6056, Concerning Automated Traffic Enforcement

Senator Maynard, Representative Guerrera and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee, I'm Andrew Schneider, Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union. I'm here once again to oppose enabling legislation for red light cameras – specifically Senate Bill No. 634 and House Bills No. 5554 and 6056.

Our objections to red light cameras and the threat they pose to civil liberties have not changed in the year since I last testified on this issue. But there have been developments around red light cameras, and they haven't been good.

In Chicago, an investigation of corruption in the city's red-light camera program has prompted Mayor Rahm Emanuel to terminate the vendor, Redflex Traffic Systems, when its contract expires in July. The Chicago Tribune reported that Redflex paid for thousands of dollars in perks and travel expenses for the city official overseeing the contract and paid the official's friend more than half a million dollars in commissions.[1] The chairman of the board of Redflex's parent company resigned and Chicago's inspector general is investigating.

The city of San Diego, following in the footsteps of Los Angeles, Albuquerque and Houston, ended red light traffic camera ticketing earlier this month. San Diego Mayor Bob Filner described the program as a "traffic trap" and noted that more than 30 percent of the citations were issued from a single intersection near the airport, targeting unsuspecting visitors.[2]

San Diego and Los Angeles are not alone in California. In the past year, many communities around that state have shut down their red light camera programs, including Pasadena, Murrieta, Glendale, San Juan Capistrano and Corona, to name a few. These communities have learned hard lessons about privatized, outsourced, for-profit, automated law enforcement, lessons that we need not repeat in Connecticut. They've learned that red light cameras enrich for-profit vendors and fail to provide the promised safety benefits and revenues for municipalities. They're also wildly unpopular with the public, who view them as a cynical cash grab.

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[1] David Kidwell *City dropping red-light camera firm as probe heats up* CHICAGO TRIBUNE (Feb. 8, 2013) http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-02-08/news/ct-met-chicago-red-light-investigation-0208-20130208_1_redflex-holdings-red-light-camera-redflex-contract

[2] City of San Diego, Office of the Mayor, *Mayor Filner Ends Red Light Photo Enforcement* (Feb. 1, 2013) http://www.sandiego.gov/mayor/pdf/2013/News_Release_Red_Light_Cameras.pdf

Drivers see red light cameras as unfair because red light cameras *are* unfair. The placement in larger municipalities puts an unequal burden on the poor and minority populations that live and drive there. The cameras threaten due process that the Constitution guarantees in cases of civil as well as criminal violations. The owners of cars are ticketed based on license plates, regardless of who was driving. Long intervals between the alleged violation and notification for the owners diminish their ability to defend themselves. If you were moving out of the way of an ambulance or fire truck at an intersection, could you remember it and prove it 60 days later? Many cases have been documented of drivers being ticketed unjustly while in funeral processions and avoiding emergency vehicles. Poorly calibrated cameras and improperly transcribed license plates have led to other unwarranted tickets.

Keep in mind that the vast majority of tickets issued from red light traffic cameras are for minor infractions that don't threaten public safety. These often involve violations so minor as to be undetectable to the human eye, such as a rolling turn on red where the tires don't come to a complete stop or even, in some places, for encroaching slightly on the white stop line. Over a three-year period in Temple Terrace, Florida, 93 percent of the tickets issued were for right-turn violations.[3] When the city of Knoxville stopped ticketing for improper right turns based on camera evidence but continued ticketing for other violations, the number of citations dropped 90 percent.[4]

These failings, the camera vendors argue, are not as important as the safety benefits. But those benefits are highly questionable, at best. The claims of improved safety are based on studies funded by the companies or the insurance industry, studies that have been repeatedly contradicted by independent research and by the experiences of individual communities such as Los Angeles, Denver and San Diego, which found no safety benefit to red light cameras. Even if you grant the same credibility to industry-funded studies as to independent research, the best you can say is that the claim of improved safety is highly controversial. Many studies have shown increases in rear-end crashes and in injuries after red-light cameras are installed.

Fortunately, there are better, easier and far more equitable ways to make intersections safer. As I noted last year, engineers from AAA worked with government officials in Michigan to cut accidents and injuries in half at several dangerous intersections. They did it by enlarging the lenses of traffic signals, repainting turning lane stripes, re-timing yellow lights and adding an all-red clearance interval. If safety is the goal, why would we not try that proven remedy first?

I urge you to observe the lessons already learned about red light cameras and to spare Connecticut the consequences of a scheme that enriches private interests, provides no public benefit and infringes on individual rights. Please reject these bills.

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[3] Howard Altman *Agencies' paths vary when cameras catch illegal right turns* THE TAMPA TRIBUNE (March 26, 2010) http://www2.tbo.com/news/polk-news/2010/mar/26/agencies-paths-vary-when-cameras-catch-illegal-rig-ar-61186/

[4] Associated Press *Red-light cam vendor sues over Tenn. Restrictions* (Nov. 11, 2011) available at http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2011/nov/11/red-light-cam-vendor-sues-knoxville/