

TESTIMONY OF
PHILADELPHIA POLICE COMMISSIONER
CHARLES RAMSEY
BEFORE THE
PENNSYLVANIA SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
REGARDING SENATE BILL 1211
APRIL 21, 2014

Good afternoon Chairman Rafferty, members of the Senate Transportation Committee and Senator Stack. My name is Charles Ramsey and I am the Police Commissioner for the City of Philadelphia. At the outset, please let me extend my appreciation to this Committee for giving me the opportunity to voice my opinion on Senate Bill 1211. I would also like to thank Senator Stack for introducing this very important piece of legislation for the City of Philadelphia.

Senate Bill 1211 authorized the use of speed enforcement cameras along the entire stretch of Route 1, otherwise known as Roosevelt Boulevard, from the Bucks County line to the interchange with Interstate 76. It should come as no surprise as to why this stretch of roadway has been singled out in this legislation. Since 2009 through April 13th of this year, 50 people have died along this roadway and there have been 17,769 vehicle accidents.

Throughout my entire career in law enforcement, this roadway is, without doubt, the most dangerous I have ever encountered. Despite a speed limit of 45 miles per hour, this roadway has become a superhighway through residential neighborhoods at ground level. To my knowledge, there is no other roadway like this in the country. The shear design, with express lanes, local lanes, crossovers, and the width, makes this roadway inherently dangerous. Adding excessive speed into this mix, and this roadway becomes treacherous. In fact, most of the accidents and deaths along this roadway are associated with excessive speed.

I am well aware that this Committee and PennDot have not ignored the dangers. On the contrary, the Pennsylvania Legislature and PennDot have been actively involved in developing possible solutions. Specifically, red light photo enforcement cameras were implemented in 2005 in Philadelphia, as a direct result of the work of the Pennsylvania State Legislature. Also, over the years, PennDot has supplied the Philadelphia Police Department with grants to provide additional traffic enforcement along this roadway.

I am truly grateful for all these efforts but more is clearly needed. Despite the most aggressive traffic enforcement by police officers, still only one violator can be stopped at a time. When one violator is stopped, 10 more can speed by with impunity. Consequently, the most aggressive traffic enforcement by police officers can only impact a relatively small number of violators. Regrettably, the enforcement action against a few has done little to change the driving culture on the Boulevard. This culture, where driving 60 and up to 80 miles per hour on this roadway is unacceptable and must change if we are going to save lives and reduce the accidents.

Current traffic enforcement tactics, alone, simply cannot bring about this change. However, I firmly believe adding the proven technology and constant vigilance of photo speed enforcement, in addition to the current and future traffic enforcement tactics of the Philadelphia Police Department, can bring about cultural change.

Let me be very clear, I am not interested in catching more people speeding. My goal is to save lives and reduce injuries. I just want people to drive at the speed limit. The design of this roadway makes it incredibly dangerous for both motorists and pedestrians alike. Excessive speed exponentially increases these dangers. I believe adding speed enforcement cameras to the overall traffic enforcement tactics available to the City of Philadelphia will dramatically change the driving culture on the Boulevard which will, in turn, save lives and reduce injuries. For this reason I fully support the passage of Senate Bill 1211.

This concludes my testimony. Again, thank you for allowing me to voice my opinion on this very important piece of legislation. At this time, I would be happy to address any questions.