

Pennsylvania State Police Testimony
Hearing on Radar Use by Municipal Police
June 17, 2014



Presented by:
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Good morning Chairmen and members of the committee. I am Colonel Frank Noonan, Commissioner of the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP). Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the concept of authorizing radar for use by municipal police.

Improving the quality of life for the residents and guests of Pennsylvania by prioritizing highway safety is one of the highest goals of the PSP. In working toward this goal, the PSP employs multiple crash-reduction strategies which are developed through a variety of methods, including the monitoring and evaluation of crash-related data and by working in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), along with other state, federal, and private entities involved in the transportation sector.

Ensuring compliance with the posted speed limits on our highways is a very important component in the effort to reduce traffic crashes. Based on information provided by PennDOT, during 2013, there were 124,077 reported traffic crashes, of which excessive speed was a factor in 31,569. The fact that one-fourth of all reported crashes in 2013 involved excessive speed clearly indicates a need for the Commonwealth's police agencies to continue making speed enforcement a central component of their overall crash-reduction strategy.

While there are several methods for conducting speed enforcement, over the years, the PSP has found the use of radar to be the most efficient. Radar, or radio

detection and ranging, transmits radio waves that reflect off of a moving vehicle and return to the unit. Speed is measured by the shift between the transmitted frequency and the return frequency, which the unit converts into a miles-per-hour speed reading. When using radar, the Trooper points the unit in the general direction of the target vehicle. At a range of 1,000 feet, the radio waves shoot out in a cone-shaped pattern that covers about 80 yards. The unit displays the speed from the strongest return signal received and an audio tone confirms the reading coming from the target vehicle. This information, coupled with the Trooper's observations of the target vehicle, is used to determine if a speeding violation has occurred.

Unlike other speed enforcement methods, which may involve on-site set up of equipment or multiple officers to operate the system, radar can be set up and operated by a single Trooper who can move from location to location with ease. With some of the other systems, there are concerns about the safety and security of expensive equipment that is deployed and left unattended while the officer goes after a violator. The operation of systems that require more than one officer to use are often limited by manpower needs and can tie up multiple officers for court hearings.

For these reasons, the PSP supports the concept of allowing municipal and regional police departments to utilize radar for speed enforcement. While this support is not in relation to any specific bill, we would be pleased to evaluate any proposed legislation and provide input based on our experience.

Further, I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to also mention that there is an even more effective tool for speed enforcement that PSP believes should be made available for use by all police departments in Pennsylvania. Lidar, or light detection and ranging, is another technology that has been in use for at least two decades. Lidar is extremely accurate, providing target specific detection. It sends out an infrared laser beam rather than a radio wave and would be especially useful in heavier traffic volumes and on multiple-lane highways. I believe this should be part of any legislation moving forward.

In conclusion, the PSP has been using radar technology since 1961. As noted in a research report conducted on behalf of the Pennsylvania State Mayors' Association, radar is permitted for use by local police to some degree in all of the 49 other states. Like the PSP, municipal and regional police departments are challenged to provide safety measures to their communities in the most efficient manner. For all of us, the use of commonly accepted technology and equipment is critical to this mission. I greatly appreciate and admire our partners in the police community in this Commonwealth and I believe it is time to authorize these very basic tools to advance the overall goal of making Pennsylvania's roads the safest in the nation.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this important topic. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.