

EXHIBIT NO.	16
DATE:	3/24/09
BILL NO.	HB531

2103 South Tracy Avenue
Bozeman, Montana 59715
March 23, 2009

Members
Highways and Transportation Committee
Montana State Senate
Helena, Montana 59620

Dear Senators:

I am writing in OPPOSITION to HB 531, An Act to Prohibit the Use of an Automated Enforcement System to Enforce a Traffic Control Device. I wanted to personal present my testimony at your hearing on this bill but unfortunately I will be on a plane traveling to my son's wedding at the time of your hearing.

I am going to wear two quite different "hats" in making my comments. I would appreciate it if you would read both.

HAT #1 --- A Traffic Safety Professional

Although now retired, I am a traffic engineer/transportation planner by profession. I am a Fellow in both the international Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) and the Association of Transportation Safety Information Professionals (ATSIP). I am a former president of the Montana Chapter of ITE. I am a former president of the Intermountain Sction of ITE (consisting of the States of Idaho, Montana, Nevada, and Utah). I have dedicated much of my professional career to promoting traffic safety.

Traffic safety professionals, be they engineers or law enforcement officers, have a "toolbox" of things they can do to improve traffic safety. Many of those tools are like medicines. Many medicines have undesirable side effects but patients still take those medications because the benefits outweigh the detrimental effects.

Cameras detecting and documenting motorists running red-lights are one tool in the traffic safety professional's toolbox. Like those medicines mentioned above, this tool has side effects. There is some evidence that the use of this tool may increase the total number of accidents.

That is **NOT** a fatal flaw. If it were, we would not install traffic signals. For decades, traffic engineers have installed new traffic signals even though they know that in most cases such an installation will increase the total number of crashes at the given intersection. However, in both cases, the number of serious crashes (those resulting in fatalities and injuries) drops even though the total number of crashes increases. The traffic safety professional determines whether the benefits outweigh the detrimental effects.

If HB 531 passes, one important tool in the traffic safety professional's toolbox will be arbitrarily and unnecessarily removed. **Please leave red-light camera programs in the traffic safety professional's toolbox. Defeat HB 531.**

HAT #2 --- A LOW-VISION PEDESTRIAN

A motorist running a red-light is putting at risk other motorists and pedestrians, particularly those pedestrians who have low-vision or are blind. I am one of those low-vision pedestrians. I am legally blind.

Pedestrians are particularly vulnerable to vehicles running red-lights. Unlike other motorists, pedestrians are not encased in a shell of protective steel. Low-vision and blind pedestrians are even more vulnerable.

I will use myself as an example. With a high degree of accuracy, I can determine when I have a green-light and presumedly could safely cross at a signalized intersection. Vehicles making right turns on red are a hazard but I can anticipate those and be alert to them. A fast moving vehicle coming from the side is an entirely different situation. I would not see the vehicle until it got "close" to the intersection. I have very little depth perception so I would not be able to judge its speed and recognize whether it was slowing or not. I can not see occupants in vehicles, so obviously I could not ascertain whether the driver appeared to be attentive or was looking elsewhere in the vehicle and/or talking on a cell-phone. Vehicle sounds are becoming less and less helpful to me as more and more vehicles are hybrid vehicles or similarly quiet vehicles and my own hearing decreases.

We as a society allow security cameras to observe us at ATM's, convenience stores, etc. They do not eliminate crime, but they provide an added deterrent to those who might commit crimes against us. They help protect us against being stabbed or shot. People often survive stabbings (I have a personal friend in Omaha who was stabbed 22 times in October and survived). At least on occasion people survive gunshots. Knives and guns are weapons. When you are a pedestrian, motor vehicles are a very deadly weapon that would likely kill a pedestrian. We pedestrians, particularly those of us who are low-vision, blind, or otherwise physically impaired need all the security we can get from those multi-thousand pound weapons.

I am not foolish enough to even suggest that installation of cameras documenting vehicles running red-lights would eliminate all red-light running. However, it would reduce the amount of red-light running and any reduction, however small, is very valuable and, I would argue, an obligation of government.

As a pedestrian, I have crossed signalized intersections in Billings, Bozeman, Butte, Great Falls, and Helena during the last twelve months. Please allow all Montana cities to take advantage of red-light cameras if they choose to do so.

Please do not just amend HB 531, DEFEAT IT!!!

Sincerely,

Ralph W. Zimmer