May 17, 2016

RE: S.5300-b/A.7901-a

Dear Senator:

Our Association, serving 2.7 million members across New York State, is writing to express concerns with S.5300-b/A.7901-a by Senator Bonacic and Assembly Member Gunther that would grant the Town of Wallkill authorization to operate red light cameras for five years.

AAA supports red light camera programs that are operated transparently, fairly, and effectively. However, insufficient state oversight has allowed municipalities to fail some or all of these criteria. We believe that there are ways to enhance the integrity and safety of camera programs, yet this bill does not take any such steps. Thus, we cannot provide full-throated support to this expansion unless simple, commonsense, proactive solutions are included in the legislation.

Properly implemented red light cameras can enhance safety. In Nassau County and Rochester, injuries have declined by 30%. However, they have not succeeded everywhere.

Since Yonkers’ cameras were installed in 2010, crashes and injuries have both increased by 7%. Unfortunately, Yonkers officials have not responded to requests to meet to discuss the program, and have misrepresented a drop in violations as evidence of the cameras’ safety benefits. In Suffolk County, red light cameras seem to show a modest aggregate benefit, but some locations show a large increase in crashes. Additionally, New York City has not disclosed camera locations as required by state law.

Wallkill officials have assured us that the program will be about safety, not revenue, and we take them at their word. However, Town officials and thus local policies are subject to change, so it would be shortsighted not to enact legislative safeguards to prevent wrongdoing.

The legislative framework has scarcely changed since New York City received authorization to operate the nation’s first red light camera program in 1988. By copying this outdated language, this legislation fails to learn from the mistakes of previous “demonstration” programs.

AAA New York State prepared a report for Wallkill that lists recommendations, including mandating warning signs, strengthening reporting requirements, instituting a statute of limitations, and most importantly, dedicating all red light camera revenue to traffic safety purposes. Accordingly, our Association respectfully requests that the bill be amended in accordance with the aforementioned recommendations.

Respectfully submitted,

John A. Corlett
Chair, Legislative Committee