

February 20, 2013

TO: THE PEOPLE OF LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT 8

SPEED CAMERAS – MORE ABOUT PICKING OUR POCKETS THAN SAFETY

I have never been a supporter of speed cameras. I always viewed them as more about getting revenue from automobile drivers than promoting safe driving. It should be noted that in the fiscal year ending last June 30, speed cameras generated \$77 million. That's twice as much as the state collected in alcohol taxes.

Maryland is one of twelve states that uses speed cameras to issue speeding tickets. Forty-one communities in the state participate in the program. The three year old program has been criticized by a recent audit for inadequate monitoring, using cameras without conducting sufficient testing to guarantee the accurate recording of a vehicle's speed, and failure to have cameras calibrated independently. Auditors also found that in a pilot program from October 2009 to June 2010, only 44% of the violation photos were readable. Despite official criticism, the program has continued to hand out erroneous tickets and rake in dollars by the millions.

Maryland law governing the speed camera program states: "if a contractor operates a speed camera system on behalf of a local jurisdiction, the contractor's fee may not be contingent on the number of citations issued or paid." Nevertheless, Baltimore County recently switched from a flat fee to a per-ticket contract. Officials have gotten around the law by a legal maneuver that reasons the local government is technically the operator of the speed cameras and the vendor is merely under contract to provide support services. Obviously, any contract that puts a profit on issuance of tickets can expect no public trust in the system.

The law states that tickets can be issued to vehicles recorded going at least 12 miles over the speed limit. The camera is supposed to snap two pictures a fraction of a second apart, showing the car, its license plate, and a stationary object. Many of the photos are unreadable. Many are issued erroneously attesting to false rates of speeds. While Baltimore City's system gives motorists two precise time-stamped photos as evidence of speeding, Baltimore and Howard Counties, as well as the State Highway Administration, give motorists photos with times rounded off to seconds, proving only that the vehicle drove past the cameras, but not proving the vehicle was speeding. As for the program's effect on curbing speeding, many law enforcement officials have noted that while the cameras make motorists reduce speed, many increase their speed as they leave the zone.

Legislation has been introduced to address the program's inaccuracies, absence of standard practices, as well as its inefficiencies. I will keep you posted on these legislative developments.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on this or any other legislative issue of concern to you. I continue to encourage and welcome your input.