



May 26, 2021



This is in reference to the recent proposal of the Black Political Empowerment Project and the Latino Welcome & Resource Center “to help prevent unnecessary arrests and deaths” for police departments to immediately suspend routine traffic stops for fourteen (14) violations, and instead issue a summons to the vehicles owners to appear in traffic court to explain their actions. The proposal is for such violations as: red lights and stop signs; speeding; illegal passing; failure to stop for school buses flashing red lights; failing to yield to pedestrians in a crosswalk; expired registration and speeding in construction zones.

The use of Traffic Cameras to issue a citation based on license plate information is by Pennsylvania law currently limited to Red Light violations in Philadelphia and Speeding in State Highway construction zones. Currently there are only ten construction site speed cameras for use on state highways in Pennsylvania.

For any other violation police **are not** permitted to issue a citation to the owner of a vehicle based on license plate information alone. We must know who was driving the vehicle at the time of the violation and the owner is not required to disclose that to police.

The fourteen traffic laws police are being asked to stop enforcing are cited by PennDOT as the most frequent contributing factors in car crashes—speeding (65%), stop sign (17%), and red light (16%) violations are the primary factors in the overwhelming majority of such crashes. Taking corrective enforcement action (citation/warning) is essential to keeping the public safe. In addition, this proposal would seriously compromise DUI enforcement by essentially allowing an impaired driver to operate a vehicle without the worry of being detected.

At the April & May 2021 meetings of our Associations, the unanimous consensus of the memberships was that the above listed violations are typical of the traffic complaints received from their communities on a regular basis. Our residents want and expect police to enforce traffic laws, and it is easy to see why: In 2019, there were 125,267 reportable traffic crashes in Pennsylvania. These crashes claimed the lives of 1,059 Pennsylvanians and injured another 76,243. By comparison, in 2019 there were 669 homicides in Pennsylvania. PennDOT estimates that economic loss due to traffic crashes cost \$1,996 to every man, woman, and child in Pennsylvania.

Traffic laws are passed by our legislature for a reason—to protect the public. Police officers have an obligation to initiate a traffic stop when a violation is observed. Today most traffic stops are recorded by car/dash or body worn cameras and can be objectively judged.

Minor, non-moving violations could be de-criminalized by the state legislature so that police are not required to make a traffic stop for things such as an expired registration, cracked taillight, partially obscured license plate or minor equipment violations. These minor offenses could be removed from the motor vehicle code to allow civil enforcement through the issuance of a citation to the recorded owner of a vehicle. However, wholesale refusal to enforce validly enacted laws, which are vital to public safety, is not a common sense solution.

Finally, being stopped by the police is a stressful situation for both the citizen and the police officer. To relieve some of that stress, we urge the public to review the pamphlet “What to Do When Stopped by the Police” found at your local police department or <https://alleghenychiefs.com/what-to-do-when-stopped-by-police> or <https://westernpachiefs.org> (click on community resources drop down). Currently, over 500,000 of these pamphlets have been distributed throughout Western Pennsylvania. This pamphlet outlines common sense recommendations on what to do, what not to do, outlines your Fourth Amendment rights, right to a hearing and appeal and how to file a complaint if you believe you were legitimately treated unfairly by the officer.

Sincerely,

Chief Alex Coghill, President
Western Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association

Chief John Sicilia, President
Allegheny County Chiefs of Police Association