

March 10, 2024

**To:** Chair Craven & the Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee

**Re:** H 7748

I submit this letter in strong opposition to the proposed legislation which aims to equip municipalities throughout the State with automated cameras to enforce "Don't Block the Box" violations.

We all share the frustration and concerns that come from blocked intersections. However, the proposed legislation misses the fact that traffic is – first and foremost – an infrastructural issue, not a personal choice. We must ask ourselves: *why are there so many cars on the road?*

A major reason is that the State of Rhode Island has systematically underfunded public transportation for decades<sup>1</sup>. The consequence of cutting both the frequency of Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) buses and the existence of routes altogether is there are now *more* vehicles on the road. The waxing demand for ride-share services like Uber has grown in response to the waning supply of buses<sup>2</sup>. There would be less "Don't Block the Box" violations if there were less cars on the road to begin with.

The State of Rhode Island, like every other state in this nation, has subscribed to a neoliberal capitalist paradigm of governance for the past 50 years. In doing so, our roads, bridges, and public transportation systems have been sacrificed - but the budgets for police and military apparatuses have grown. Consider the fact that the existing speed cameras in Rhode Island raked in a staggering \$51 million in fines between 2020-2022<sup>3</sup>. The new public safety complex in North Providence cost taxpayers \$30 million<sup>4</sup>. However, when it comes to vital public transit services, Governor McKee is

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.anchorweb.org/post/ri-public-transit-maliciously-neglected-by-state-facing-disasters>

<sup>2</sup> See: "How Ride-Sharing Is Shaping Public Transit System: A Counterfactual Estimator Approach" by Yang & Qui (2021), available here: [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3924487](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3924487)

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://turnto10.com/i-team/on-your-dime/rhode-island-traffic-speed-red-light-cameras-east-providence-pawtucket-providence-central-falls-fines-citations-tickets>

<sup>4</sup> See: <https://nppolice.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/North-Providence-Police-Annual-Report-for-year-2018.pdf>

only willing to give RIPTA \$10 million of the necessary \$18 million it needs to operate at current levels<sup>5</sup>. The alleged "labor shortage" at RIPTA is a corollary of this fiscal cliff – which compels more workers to retire or change employers – and discourages prospective workers from ever applying.

If **H 7748** is passed, the State would effectively be double-dipping insofar as it saves money by underfunding public transit while also siphoning money from the same motorists it threw overboard for "blocking the box". The State would be waging a double-attack on its population. This is abhorrent and unacceptable behavior. A society that prioritizes punishment over providing for the basic needs of its people is circling the drain.

Before trying to penalize drivers for misjudging the timing on a light-change, the General Assembly should first do its due diligence to adequately fund public transportation.

Before trying to penalize drivers for misjudging the timing on a light-change, the General Assembly should figure out what to do about the structurally deficient Washington Bridge. Proposing this legislation when one of the main arteries of the state is in absolute disrepair is laughable, to say the least.

I urge you to ensure that **H 7748** never sees the light of day.

Respectfully Submitted,

Darryl Walker, Jr.

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<sup>5</sup> See: <https://steveahlquist.substack.com/p/the-truth-behind-riptas-drastic-service>