

Chairman Rafferty and members of the Senate Transportation Committee:

Good afternoon. My name is Elam M. Herr, and I am the assistant executive director for the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of the 1,455 townships in Pennsylvania represented by the Association.

Townships comprise 95 percent of the commonwealth's land area and are home to more than 5.1 million Pennsylvanians — nearly 42 percent of the state's population. These townships are very diverse, ranging from rural communities with fewer than 200 residents to more populated communities with populations approaching 70,000 residents.

Today our society is moving at a faster pace and more people seem to be speeding in an attempt to keep up with their busy lives. Township supervisors frequently hear complaints from their residents that cars are traveling at excessive speeds and causing dangerous conditions on township roads. Residents worry about the safety of their children, their pets, and themselves on roads where speeding is prevalent. In fact, speeding and traffic related conditions are the most frequent complaints received by the board of supervisors in many townships.

We believe that the ability to use radar would greatly increase the ability of municipal police to enforce speed limits on local roads and therefore improve safety for our communities. Similarly, Light Detection and Ranging, or LIDAR, could also provide these efficiencies. While municipal police currently possess several tools to enforce speed limits, all are currently inferior in terms of cost and flexibility to radar and LIDAR, the most commonly used tools by state and local police across the country, but tools that are currently denied to local police in Pennsylvania.

Currently local police in Pennsylvania may use limited Visual Average Speed Computer and Recorder, or VASCAR, and other speed timing devices such as Electronic Non-Radar Devices, commonly known as ENRADD. While accurate, these techniques have significant drawbacks.

VASCAR is inefficient because at least two officers are needed to use it. One car takes the speed measurements and remains stationary, while a second officer is needed as a chase car. On four lane roads, more than one chase car is needed. With radar and LIDAR, one officer could both take the speed measurements and flag down the driver. Radar would allow a municipal police department to improve the efficiency of its staffing and enhance safety by increasing the number of roads where it could be actively enforcing the speed limit. Remember, traffic control is only one of many duties of a municipal police department.

Additionally, VASCAR requires specific site distances and lines to be painted on the roads for the use of the device. This is costly and inconvenient. On certain roads, radar is the only method that municipal police could use to enforce speed limits and improve safety.

Recently, ENRADD has become a commonly used municipal speed enforcement tool in Pennsylvania. These units are accurate and eliminate the human error factor in techniques such as VASCAR. They are more reliable than VASCAR and are currently the next best thing to radar

for Pennsylvania municipal officers. This technique allows enforcement of speed limits in areas of the municipality where officers are unable to use VASCAR, enables officers to be less visible to motorists as it allows them to monitor speed from a distance, and with a wireless device, can be operated with only one officer.

While this is the next best thing to radar or LIDAR, ENRADD still has a number of drawbacks that make radar and LIDAR superior tools. The equipment is cumbersome and the units must be manually set up beside the road. Aligning the transmitter and receiver bars is time consuming and can be dangerous if it is being set up by one officer, who must run back and forth across the road to align the beams. The crown of the road can interfere with aligning the beams, making the units unusable on hilly or mountainous terrain, as well as during inclement weather. Because they are battery operated, the ENRADD units can only be used for a limited time before the power source needs recharged.

While ENRADD can be used by one officer, a minimum of two officers is needed to set up and use the device safely, one to operate the device and one to stop violators. Because the units set beside the road, they can be damaged by passing vehicles or stolen if the officer is called away and does not have time to retrieve the devices. Keep in mind that ENRADD is only commonly used in Pennsylvania. In other states where radar and LIDAR are available to local officers, ENRADD is uncommon.

If radar and LIDAR are authorized for use by municipal police, we have no problem with applying the same “cushions” to these tools that municipal police departments currently must comply with when using VASCAR or ENRADD. Under current law, there is a six miles per hour allowance for zones with speed limits of 55 miles per hour and a 10 mile per hour allowance for zones with speed limits less than 55 miles per hour. We believe the allowances for VASCAR, ENRADD, and radar should be uniform for local police for enforcement purposes.

Again, while VASCAR and ENRADD can be useful tools, both are inferior to radar and LIDAR. We believe that authorizing the use of radar and LIDAR for municipal police would greatly enhance traffic safety in the commonwealth and give municipalities the tools they need to make the best use of their officers’ valuable time.

Finally, Pennsylvania is the only state that prohibits municipal police from using radar. Municipal police officers are professionals who receive substantial training that is approved and provided by the Pennsylvania State Police and should be permitted to use radar to improve the safety of the community. Certification for local police by the PSP should stem fears that municipal police are not competent in the use of radar. Radar and LIDAR are tools that municipalities need to enforce speed limits and improve public safety.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to comment on this issue. I’ll be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.