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Advocating for Radar: SB 607 or Bust

In 2012, the major municipal associations and the Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association realized that their uncoordinated efforts of perennial conference resolutions and individual lobbying concerning the need for radar for municipal police were ineffective in bringing about legislative change.

As the saying goes: "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result." These associations decided to take a different approach in which they would work closely and collaboratively to achieve their common goal of protecting the people of Pennsylvania from the dangers of speeding motorists.

On Jan. 10, 2013, the Radar Coalition was created. In addition to the Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association, the original

members were the Pennsylvania Municipal League, Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs, Pennsylvania State Association of Township Commissioners, Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors, and Pennsylvania State Mayors' Association. Later, the Fraternal Order of Police, Pennsylvania State Lodge joined the group as well as the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia.

The members of the Radar Coalition knew that if they worked together and used all of their available resources, it would only be a matter of time before municipal police would be given the tool to enforce the Vehicle Code's maximum speed laws uniformly, effectively, and efficiently in their municipalities.

Many members of the coalition now believe that the 2019-20

legislative session will be the one during which their collective efforts will come to fruition and the legislative prohibition against municipal police using radar will finally come to an end.

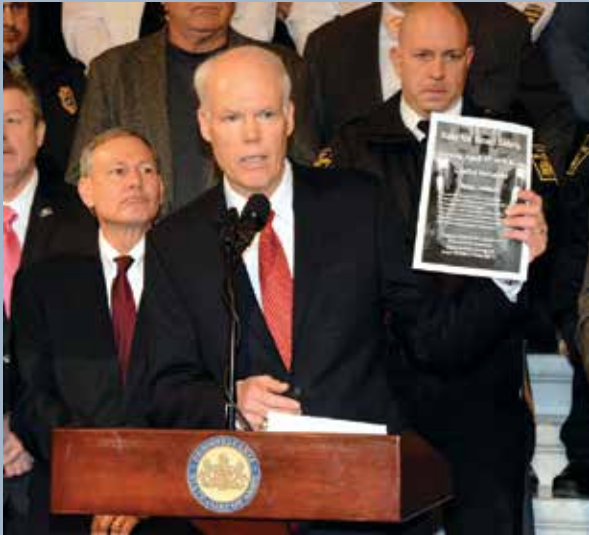
There are several reasons for this optimism.

Statistics Show Need for Radar

First, the message of the Radar Coalition is incontrovertible, backed up with statistics from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) that have consistently shown PA has the worst record for speeding-related fatalities in the U.S.

This is based on the *total number* of speeding-related fatalities as well as the percentage of

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Mayor James Nowalk spoke at a press conference about the need for radar at the state Capitol in 2016.

speeding-related fatalities to total fatalities reported for each state each year.

Since PA prevents its municipal police from enforcing maximum speed laws but enables State Police to do so, logically, the vast majority of PA speeding-related fatalities would be on roads patrolled primarily by municipal police. That is precisely what the statistics of the NHTSA demonstrate.

The numbers cannot (and have not) justified the state's continued stance on this conflicting (and deadly) system of speed enforcement.

Those who claim that municipal police would use a radar gun to make money are ignoring Pennsylvania law which prohibits the use of any speed-timing device for this purpose by municipal police or State Police.

Plus, the cost of enforcement is not balanced out by the revenue

from such tickets. Additionally, municipal police officers are trained to enforce laws without consideration of the revenue raised.

Legislative Progress

The second reason for optimism is that in every legislative session since the creation of the Radar Coalition, a bill has moved farther in the legislative process.

During the 2013-14 legislative session, SB 1340, sponsored by former State Sen. Randy Vulakovich, was never reported out of the Senate Transportation Committee. He introduced the same bill as SB 535 during the 2015-16 legislative session. This bill made it out of the Senate by a vote of 47-3 but stalled in the House Transportation Committee.

In the 2017-18, SB 251 was reported out of the Senate and House

Transportation Committees; however, it only received one consideration on the floor of the House before it was "laid on the table."

In the 2019-20 legislative session, the Radar Coalition believes that it can build on its previous efforts and move SB 607, a bill sponsored by Sen. Mario Scavello (R-Monroe), through the same legislative process onto the floor of the House and ultimately to the governor's desk.

Leadership Changes

The third reason for optimism is the changes in the General Assembly since the last legislative session which are favorable to the success of the Radar Coalition.

Scavello has impressive credentials as the sponsor of the SB 607. He is a former mayor and county commissioner, vice chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee, and a member


of the Senate Appropriations Committee. He is also a former member of the House of Representatives.

There is also a new majority leader in the House of Representatives and a new majority chair, minority chair, and executive director of the House Transportation Committee. All of these individuals are expected to be more open to supporting SB 607 than their predecessors.

The time has arrived for the General Assembly to pass a bill that allows municipal police to use radar to enforce the Vehicle Code's maximum speed limits enacted by the legislature for the safety of the public.

The wait of six long years since the creation of the Radar Coalition may make legislators and voters ponder how many speeding-related fatalities could have been averted had the General Assembly acted earlier.

The coalition and its supporters remain committed to ending the unnecessary deaths of motorists and pedestrians on the state's roads. They believe it's time, and it's SB 607 or bust.

About the author: James Nowalk is the president of the Pennsylvania State Mayors' Association and a spokesperson for the Radar Coalition. 



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