

TO THE OHIO STATE SENATE

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RE: Testimony in Support of retention of the current state statute requiring front vehicular license plates

Chairman McColley and members of the Senate Transportation Committee, I submit the following testimony in support of Ohio's front plate requirement. I wish to present first-hand testimony, documenting two instances wherein I was able to assist two different Cleveland Suburban Police Departments in the arrest and conviction in two incidents where I was able to locate, identify and advise of the vehicular direction of fleeing suspects, via ONLY the discernment and recognition of just the front vehicular license plate.

The two incidents, as further described, took place in the early 1980's, I think one was in 1982, the other 1983. At that time I was employed by the City of East Cleveland, as City Engineer/Service Director/ Vice City Manager. Although not a fully commissioned Police Officer with a bullet proof vest and a gun, I was a badged employee and empowered to have use of an undercover unmarked city vehicle equipped with the Police and Service Department Radio Channels. I also at several times "rode with an officer" and was present during arrests and high speed pursuits, albeit unarmed and without a bullet proof vest.

#### INCIDENT NUMBER ONE

I think this was in the summer of 1983 and was in my unmarked East Cleveland city vehicle and was outside of the City limits of East Cleveland, returning from a meeting in downtown City of Cleveland. I was monitoring the Police and Service radio channels when the Police Dispatcher abruptly announced of a burglary in progress, with the suspects fleeing with an Ohio license plate observed by witness to the crime. Since I was outside of the City limits, I thought maybe I could spot the vehicle fleeing the scene. I had to imagine which way they were driving and hoped to be driving in the opposite direction of their travel reading every oncoming license plate, as the witness did NOT give the color or make and model of their fleeing burglary vehicle.

After a few minutes I did spot the wanted vehicle via ONLY the front license plate and pulled a U-turn in pursuit. Over the Police radio, I gave the approximate location and direction of the suspect vehicle and advised East Cleveland and the nearby Bratenahl Police Departments that I was in pursuit and requested immediate backup, further advising that I was unarmed and that my vehicle was unmarked without flashers.

Well, over and in the course of a few minutes, we had a combined police pursuit involving my vehicle and Police Patrol vehicles from the two aforementioned police departments. When the closest East Cleveland Police vehicle was in my rear view mirrors, he asked me to move over so he could get closer to the burglary vehicle, he further asked me to advise more of the color, make and model and my approximate estimation of how many vehicles ahead of us were the fleeing suspects.

As the East Cleveland and Bratenahl Police vehicles closed in, one of the suspects bailed and both a vehicular and foot-chase pursuit commenced and all suspects were arrested and were much later convicted and incarcerated. When I arrived back at the Police Station several East Cleveland Police Officers clapped and congratulated me, but then also related to me there were guns and rifles in the burglars' possession. As a result of my action and intervention, I was awarded a commendation, a Crime Prevention Award and a cassette copy of the radio chatter police pursuit, I still have it in my possession!

#### INCIDENT NUMBER TWO

This scenario involvement of my identification of ONLY a front place occurred, I think in the fall of 1982. As described in the earlier testimony, I was employed by the City of East Cleveland and had use of my unmarked city vehicle for work purposes and was also privileged with commuting use to and from work. The initial encounter with the hit-and-run motorist was however in my personal vehicle with my wife and toddler son Matt also in the vehicle. As we were just approaching our home street in Moreland Hills, I put on my left turn signal and was abruptly hit by another vehicle who violated the signed "NO PASSING ZONE". Upon and just after the collision, I first checked on my wife and toddler and then expected the other driver to get out and dialogue on the ensuing action to be taken on both parts.

Well the other driver then took off speeding, and I chased it as far and as fast as I could but with my wife and son in the car had to abandon pursuit for their safety and was only able to get 4 of the 5 alphanumeric digits or the license plate of this hit-and run motorist. Over the next couple of days my companion friends at the East Cleveland Police Department tried running the plate assuming the missing digit but only one vehicle showed up close and it was undamaged, so it seemed that the hit-and-run motorist got away with damaging my vehicle and endangering our three lives.

With my personal vehicle now damaged, I requested and was granted a short term 24 hour use of my East Cleveland vehicle while my car was in the shop being repaired. For about a week after the accident, I again kept looking and was hoping to find and identify the entire vehicular license plate of the other motorist. For what might be a really unimaginable set of circumstances and coincidences (I call it a miracle) I was on my way to church services with two of my older children and spotted the hit-and-run vehicle, noticed the damage and went to the nearest police station in my City vehicle and gave them the make, model and color and approximate location and the Woodmere Police Department found the subject vehicle and escorted it back to Moreland Hills, wherein we were called in to identify the suspect. Please note again that this crime was solved by me, via ONLY the front vehicular license plate.

In closing, I would ask all state senators to please vote to retain the current state statute requiring front license plates! Additionally, I would ask that each of you respectfully try a little field exercise. While driving on a two lane or four lane city street, try to read and recall of the license plates of every vehicle coming at you in the opposite direction, now try to read and recall the license plates ahead of you driving your direction.

Respectfully submitted  
Ross M. Brankatelli, P.E.