



**WEST MANCHESTER TOWNSHIP
FIRE & EMERGENCY SERVICE**

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TESTIMONY OF

Chief John J. Bierling

Township Fire Chief

West Manchester Township Fire & Emergency Service

to the members of the

House Judiciary Subcommittee on

Crime and Corrections

November 13, 1997

Good morning. I am testifying as a member of the Statewide Fire Advisory Board and on behalf of the Pennsylvania Fire Services Institute. As a municipal Fire Chief, I am also testifying from the local, operational perspective. While this legislation does not directly impact the fire service, I appreciate the opportunity to testify on emergency vehicle lighting and the public perception of emergency responders.

The Pennsylvania Fire Services Institute is a statewide non-profit fire and emergency medical service organization. We work on behalf of 107 volunteer and career fire and emergency service groups at the local, regional, and state levels. Every major emergency service organization in Pennsylvania is represented on our Statewide Fire Advisory Board. The institute's mission is to educate the public, including our elected officials, about the important role of emergency services in our Commonwealth.

In recent months, the Institute has worked closely with the Pennsylvania State Police, The Pennsylvania State Troopers Association, and the Pennsylvania State Lodge Fraternal Order of Police regarding lighting and audible warning signals on emergency vehicles. The fire service and law enforcement community agree that public education regarding emergency vehicle lighting is needed.

The public must understand that red and blue combination lights are for law enforcement vehicles only. In the past, fire department owned fire police vehicles and fire police captain and lieutenant personal vehicles have run with red and blue combination lights. Approximately two years ago, in my fire department, we removed the red and blue lights from the fire police vehicles and replaced them with all red emergency lights. There has been absolutely no change in our ability to respond to emergencies and move through traffic in a safe manner when

responding to emergencies. The Pennsylvania Fire Police association supports the use of red and blue combination lights for law enforcement only. Fire Department owned fire police vehicles and fire police captain and lieutenant personal vehicles should be using red lights only.

Recently in a few isolated incidents, fire departments and fire chiefs have been threatened with traffic citations for using emergency lighting while backing the emergency service vehicle into the station. We believe we are permitted under Title 75 to use emergency lights while backing safely into the station. Common sense would dictate that when you are backing a 20 ton vehicle and you must momentarily block a state route or main artery of traffic, activation of your emergency lights would be a safe and proper practice.

Blue lights. While the issue of volunteer firefighters using blue lights seems to generate controversy, it is important to recognize the purpose of the use of these lights. The primary purpose of a blue light is to identify a volunteer firefighter and allow that person entry into the emergency scene where the general public is denied access. A secondary purpose centers on getting to the fire station or emergency scene more easily with the public granting the right of way as a courtesy. An individual displaying a blue light on their vehicle has no right or reason to violate any traffic law or to place the public in danger while using that light. There is adequate legislation already in place on this issue and infractions should be handled at the local level by the fire chief or municipality.

Green lights. The fire service has been implementing The Incident Command System as the proper means of organizing and effectively managing our operations at an emergency scene. Incident Command formulates an organizational structure similar to the chain of command in the military. Incident Command is most

effective when multi-jurisdictional departments or agencies become involved in an incident. A flashing or revolving green light located on a stationary emergency vehicle, indicated the incident command post. We do not advocate placing green lights on personal vehicles or on moving emergency service vehicles.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue. The Institute will certainly continue our efforts to work with the law enforcement community, the legislature, and the administration regarding emergency vehicle lights. I am happy to answer any questions.