

Testimony of
Chief Edward J Connor
before
The House Subcommittee on Crime and Corrections
on
Unmarked Police Vehicles
- November 13, 1997 -

My name is Edward J Connor. I am a thirty three year veteran of law enforcement and am presently the Chief of Police of the Ferguson Township Police Department in Centre County. I am privileged to serve as Chairman of the Law Committee of the Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association and as a member of the Traffic Committee.

I appreciate the opportunity to address this committee on the important issue of whether or not this panel will recommend denying the police officers of this state the ability to stop a motor vehicle the officer observes breaking the law if the officer is operating a fully equipped police vehicle which happens to be unmarked.

The Chiefs of Police Association recognizes the seriousness of the recent incidents involving individuals using emergency lights and in some cases, police uniforms to pull people over and proceed to commit other crimes. These criminal acts need to be addressed, not the denial of an important tool utilized by the men and women in police service.

In that vein, representatives of the Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association have been working with representatives of the Fraternal Order of Police, the Pennsylvania State Police, the State Troopers Association, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and representative of Professional and Volunteer Fire Fighters, Emergency Response Services and Fires Police.

In a series of meetings earlier this year the aforementioned representatives developed the following recommendations to more adequately address this issue rather than penalize law enforcement.

1. INCREASE THE PENALTY FOR IMPERSONATING A POLICE OFFICER TO A FELONY. INCLUDE THE ACT OF USING AN EMERGENCY LIGHT TO FORCE A MOTORIST TO PULL OVER IN THE DEFINITION OF IMPERSONATING A POLICE OFFICER.
2. IDENTIFY THE TYPE OF LIGHTING AUTHORIZED FOR EACH RESPECTIVE TYPE OF EMERGENCY VEHICLE, EDUCATE THE PUBLIC AND THE USERS OF SUCH EQUIPMENT AND THEN STRICTLY ENFORCE THE REGULATIONS.

Members of the Pennsylvania State Police are in the process of researching and developing such protocol following the suggestions and recommendations of the representatives of the groups and agencies I have already mentioned.

3. PROHIBIT AND STRICTLY ENFORCE THE USE OR POSSESSION OF EMERGENCY LIGHTS BY UNAUTHORIZED PERSONS.
4. IN ORDER TO EFFECT A VEHICLE STOP, THE EMERGENCY VEHICLE MUST HAVE BOTH VISUAL AND AUDIO SIGNALING DEVICES.
5. ALL REPRESENTATIVE GROUPS HAVE AGREED TO WORK TOGETHER TO EDUCATE THE PUBLIC AND THEIR MEMBERS IN THE PROPER USE OF EMERGENCY LIGHTING AND WHAT TO DO IF AN OPERATOR IS UNSURE OF THE IDENTITY OF A PERSON ATTEMPTING TO PULL THEM OVER.

The Pennsylvania State Police have already developed a public service video depicting appropriate measures a motorist can take to ensure the person pulling them over is in fact a law enforcement officer.

In conclusion, the professional and volunteer emergency services providers in Pennsylvania have recognized that unmarked police vehicles are a necessary part of law enforcement and play an important part in not only traffic safety, but in DUI enforcement, narcotics investigations and major felony arrests. Many significant arrests have been made using unmarked vehicles when the initial reason for the stop was a minor traffic violation. We request you listen to our recommendations and direct your ire at the perpetrator where it belongs, not on Pennsylvania's Police Officers. Thank you.