

214TH NEW JERSEY LEGISLATURE
SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
HON. NICK SACCO--CHAIR

TESTIMONY

ERIC BLOMGREN

Government Affairs

New Jersey Gasoline-Convenience-Automotive Association

A-354/S-3028

SUPPORT

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COMMITTEE ROOM 7
TRENTON, NJ 08625

Testimony of Eric Blomgren

Chairman Sacco and members of the Committee, my name is Eric Blomgren. I represent the New Jersey Gasoline, Convenience Store, and Automotive Association (NJGCA). Our membership includes some of the thousands of independent auto repair businesses in New Jersey. These are some of America's quintessential small businesses and I thank you for the opportunity to testify on their behalf today regarding this important matter.

This bill, which institutes a common sense change in the law to require that *all* of a vehicle's lights are kept in working order, addresses a problem that the automotive repair professionals I represent see every single day. It's a problem that I'm positive you have noticed yourselves as you have been on the road.

Since motor vehicle safety inspections were eliminated over three years ago, our members have consistently reported seeing a dramatic increase in the number of motorists coming in for repairs or oil changes with nonworking lamps or other lighting devices. In the past, most motorists would have asked the mechanic to make the necessary fixes so that they could pass their next safety inspection. However, now that there is no fear of failing a safety inspection, many motorists are content to ignore the problem and save their money.

This attitude endangers everyone on the road today. I know from personal experience that there are times on the highway when being able to see a single brake light from a car ahead of me has allowed me to come to a stop in time. We all use the roads, and this bill will promote driver safety, something that is a concern to my organization. At NJGCA our motto is that we are "serving the small businesses that serve the motorist."

Since the elimination of mandatory safety inspections, NJGCA has promoted to our members that they should continue to check their customers' vehicles for any safety violations. We have encouraged auto repair professionals to educate their customers that even though safety inspections have been eliminated, they are still legally required to keep their car maintained. Three years ago, we designed, printed, and mailed brochures and posters to be displayed in their repair shops promoting the importance of maintaining a safe automobile. A copy of that brochure is included with this testimony.

This bill will push motorists to actually step up and bear the costs associated with driving in this state. In addition to increasing road safety, it will also provide some help for the state's independent auto repairers. Over the course of the last decade, they have felt themselves being squeezed out of the business by the big auto corporations who have been trying to use advances in technology to force motorists to have their repairs done at dealerships. It is a regular aspect of a mechanic's life to have to tell their customer that they can't fully fix their car simply because they don't have access to the codes necessary to install the equipment.

Thankfully, there is an answer to his conundrum that will help small businesses and consumers looking for more choice: Right to Repair. The New Jersey Assembly passed Right to Repair five years ago but unfortunately it never made it into law. Last year, the state of Massachusetts became the first in the nation to pass Right to Repair when 86% of voters voted in favor of it. We hope that in the next few months New Jersey will become the second state in the nation to give consumers a Right to Repair. I hope I can count on your support when the time comes.

Though it is still our position that the best thing for road safety would be to reinstate mandatory safety inspections; in the absence of that I believe that A-354 is a good bill that will make our roads safer. I am also interested in strengthening other safety provisions related to motor vehicle upkeep, since the professionals that I represent are witnessing very troubling safety issues that are being ignored by motorists. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if you would be interested in such a proposal.

Thank you.