



Pictures at an intersection

Bill has a message for red-light runners: Stop

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Red-light runners don't have a lobbyist in Tallahassee to speak for them, but they hardly need one. Their message is unmistakably clear at intersection after intersection throughout our region and state: "Sorry, but I'm too busy, too important, to stop for the rest of you."

The results of this careless attitude are clear, too -- tragically so. In Florida last year, 106 people were killed and 10,720 others were injured in accidents caused by drivers who failed to stop at traffic signals, according to the state Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles.

Two Bradenton Republicans, state Rep. Ron Reagan and state Sen. Mike Bennett, hope to reduce those numbers significantly with the "Mark Wandall Traffic Safety Act" -- a bill named in honor of a Manatee County man who was killed by a red-light runner in 2003, a few weeks before the birth of his daughter.

An option to install cameras

The legislation, scheduled for a hearing this afternoon before the House Committee on Infrastructure, would give counties and cities the option to install cameras at traffic signals and impose a \$125 fine on anyone whose car or truck is detected running a red light.

Under the bill, the owners of the vehicles in violation would be ticketed. No points would be assessed against the driver's license, and insurance companies would not be able to use the infractions to set rates.

The measure also outlines an appeals process for people who receive tickets and requires communities that use traffic cameras to submit yearly reports to the state detailing ticketing procedures and results.

More than 330 U.S. communities -- including 95 in California, 56 in Texas, 22 in Georgia and nine in Ohio -- use cameras to combat red-light running, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

Florida's code unclear

Only two Florida communities, Apopka near Orlando and Gulf Breeze near Pensacola, are on that list, largely because the state's Uniform State Traffic Code does not expressly ban or allow cameras.

As red-light running grows more prevalent, however, other communities --including Orlando and Hillsborough County -- have given up waiting for the Legislature to clarify the state code and have approved or tentatively endorsed the use of cameras on their own.

Some critics of the Reagan-Bennett bill contend that red-light cameras are just a money-making venture for local governments.

Yes, the tickets would generate extra revenue for communities. But red-light cameras would have a far more important effect. They would save lives and spare thousands from serious injuries.

And, perhaps in time, the cameras will help raise the level of civility on our state's roads and foster an understanding that no one's time is worth endangering the lives of others.

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