Written by **James Murphy** on November 22, 2024

Illinois Democrat Believes Chicago Traffic-light Cameras May Be Racist

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An Illinois state representative is seeking answers about a recent report claiming that traffic-light cameras on the city's south side are disproportionately targeting black and Latino drivers — two and a half times more than similar cameras on the north side.

Illinois State Representative La Shawn Ford, a Democrat, wants the city to investigate the discrepancy. He suggests that the cameras are to blame for racial profiling.

Ford had previously called for the cameras to be discontinued, after a *Chicago Tribune* report disclosed that over half of the intersections where the cameras were placed were declared among the safest in Illinois by the Illinois Department of Transportation.

Chicago has more red-light cameras than any other large city in the nation, and "social justice" advocates worry that inner-city neighborhoods are being unfairly targeted. A ProPublica report has detailed many of the issues with Chicago's traffic cameras and perceived targeting of minority communities.

Tickets a "Money Grab"

"It's clearly a money grab and it's not fair," Ford said of ticketing due to the cameras. "The question is are the people on the South Side of Chicago driving to that degree that they deserve to be disproportionately impacted by a system, or is the system flawed? I would urge the city to do some type of investigation."

"The tickets are one problem, but the impact that these tickets have on families is devastating," he claims. "If I get multiple tickets and I'm placed on a boot list, then my car gets towed and I lose my car. Then I have these tickets and I have to file bankruptcy to eliminate the debt. Government should not be in the business of driving people into poverty. We know that this regressive tax hits people in poverty more and drives people deeper into poverty."

Said Olatunji Oboi Reed, a chicago race advocate who has received such tickets:

> We felt the brunt of [the tickets] the way white people didn't. Fortunately, I've always been in a situation where I can survive financially, unlike many Black and brown people in the city; one ticket is throwing their whole finances in a hurricane.

Racial Profiling by Humans and Cameras

Believing that racial profiling may be a part of the situation, Ford has called for an investigation into the

use of the cameras:

> There should be a deep dive investigation to explain because we know that when you compare the traffic stops by human beings, we learned that there was a reason behind it. People were racially profiled. We have to ask ourselves how are the residents in the South Side of Chicago receiving three times the number of tickets. I think the public deserves transparency and explanation as to whether there are more chances for this population to be ticketed.

Ironically, the cameras were once seen as a race-neutral way of enforcing traffic laws. Race watchers had always complained that minorities were unfairly targeted by police. They were initially started in Chicago by Mayor Richard M. Daley nearly two decades ago.

Expanded Under Lightfoot

The use of the cameras was greatly expanded during Lori Lightfoot's time as mayor. Much of the reasoning behind their increased use had to do with perceived traffic safety issues in the city.

"If someone is a reckless driver, that is a fundamental concern to the mayor," said Dan Lurie, Lightfoot's policy chief. He continued:

> That fine and fee, we believe, can help change behavior. [However,] that fine and fee should not put someone in a place where they are unable to pay it, where they are making choices about whether they could put food on the table instead of paying that fine or fee.

So, did a black, female mayor of Chicago institute the expansion of a program that was inherently racist?

A more reasonable explanation may be that the residents of these areas may run red lights and break traffic laws out of fear of carjackings and other crimes endemic to such places. The root cause of the reckless driving in Chicago is not the traffic cameras, but the dangerous city itself.

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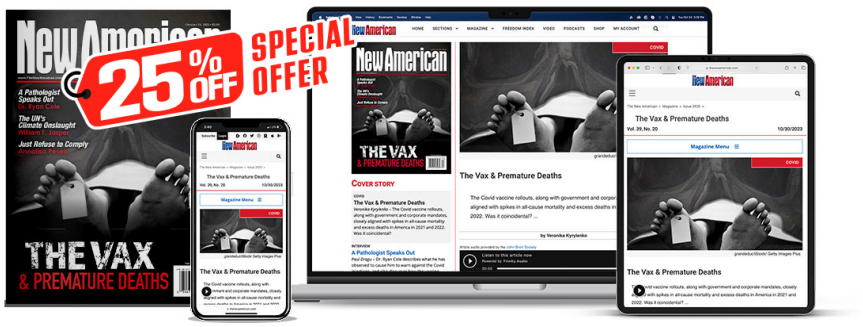

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