



NATIONAL MOTORISTS ASSOCIATION

Empowering Drivers Since 1982

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The Honorable Elaine Chao, Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Madam Secretary,

As the Trump Administration reviews candidates to fill the vacant position of administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the National Motorists Association urges you, as the administration's leader on transportation issues, to shake up the status quo and push for a nominee willing to reverse too many years of anti-motorist policies.

The fundamental question at stake is should the U.S. Department of Transportation be better known for promoting ticket quotas or highway safety? In the past several decades, state and local governments have seen NHTSA as a means of supplementing ever-burgeoning enforcement budgets. Motorists have borne the brunt of the resulting ticket-blitz campaigns.

Consider that half of NHTSA's \$1.2 billion budget goes to Highway Traffic Safety Grants, and much of that to data-driven Section 402 Formula Grants and "High Visibility Enforcement Support." States jump at the chance to receive tens of millions of dollars that their law enforcement agencies can use to run ticketing campaigns throughout the year while accumulating significant federally funded overtime compensation. When the incentives for highway enforcement programs are revenue-based, traffic safety improvements and the rights of motorists often become secondary considerations.

If this system sounds like federally sanctioned ticket quotas, that's because it is. In the annual highway traffic safety plan that states must submit each year to NHTSA as a prerequisite for the granting of federal highway funds, the following statistics must be reported:

- A-1 Seat Belt Citations Issued During Grant-Funded Enforcement Activities
- A-2 Impaired Driving Arrests During Grant-Funded Enforcement Activities
- A-3 Speeding Citations Issued During Grant-Funded Enforcement Activities

Highway safety programs should be evaluated with safety performance metrics, not activity-based goals that can lead to questionable motivations. The effect that ticket-blitz enforcement campaigns have on safety is debatable. What isn't debatable is that making funding contingent on meeting certain activity levels is a direct incentive for state and local law enforcement to implement a quota system. At a time when we desperately need stronger bonds of trust and respect between the nation's 250 million licensed drivers and police agencies, the current system is only making the situation worse.

continued other side

To illustrate how completely the states have embraced the flawed, activity-based highway funding system, look no further than the effort from a few years ago between the Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning (OHSP) and Western Michigan University (WMU) to establish overtime traffic enforcement performance standards. The agency and school developed a performance metric for NHTSA-funded enforcement grants based on “equivalent stops per billable hour:”

Equivalent stops = 4 x number of arrests + total number of vehicle stops ÷ total billed hours

The metric credits each enforcement agency for every traffic stop made and places a greater value to arrests made on stops supported by federal grants.

The National Motorists Association and its members feel it is imperative that the administration make a bold choice for NHTSA administrator, someone who would take the hundreds of millions of funding dollars granted to the states for enforcement activities and redirect much of those resources toward proven highway safety improvement programs. Secretary Chao, we ask that, under your leadership, motorists will once again see police focused on assisting motorists and improving safety, not looking to issue tickets to fill a federal quota.

Existing grants should instead focus on enhancing driver education programs, particularly by taking advantage of modern driving environment simulators. Federal programs should encourage advanced driver skills training for novice drivers, and require that states reevaluate and optimize posted highway speed limits to encourage more natural, uniform traffic flow, as this is the time-tested method of reducing accidents. Section 402 and High Visibility Enforcement grant monies should also be redirected to desperately needed state road construction projects

If highway safety improvements are truly the goal then these programs, rather than data-driven enforcement activities, should be the priority.

Sincerely,



Gary Biller
President
National Motorists Association

The National Motorists Association is an alliance of motorists who lobby for traffic regulations and enforcement actions that are based on safety, not revenue, considerations.