

**Testimony of Gersh Kuntzman**  
**Editor in Chief, Streetsblog**  
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Hello, senators. I am Gersh Kuntzman, a longtime New York journalist and currently the editor of the transportation news site, Streetsblog.

Over the last three years, I have intensely covered the growing problem of drivers who deface or cover their license plates to avoid being held accountable for their recklessness.

First, how reckless are drivers? In New York City, the 2,000 speed cameras issued 5.9 million tickets in 2023 — roughly 16,250 per day — to people driving 11 miles per hour or more above the speed limit. And New York City's red-light cameras — which are at fewer than 1 percent of intersections — issued more than 704,000 tickets, or roughly 1,930 per day.

But there's a snake in this enforcement Eden: drivers who seek to evade accountability.

Initially, unreadable plates comprised just 1 percent of the cars that triggered speed cameras. But by August 2022, the number of unreadable plates had jumped to more than 7 percent, [as Streetsblog reported](#).

Subsequently, the city comptroller pointed out a bigger problem [with covered or defaced plates](#): in 2023, more than *41 percent* of speed camera images captured by Verra Mobility, which runs our speed camera program, are thrown out even before the images can be adjudicated. The report concluded that more than 1 million speeding incidents could not be processed because of covered or fake plates.

That number is likely to rise as drivers find more ways to trick the cameras. For instance, online retailers such as Amazon and Ebay are filled with offers of customizable metal plates for just \$20. And souvenir shops all over Manhattan are selling cheap metal plates for \$9. I brought one with me — a fairly obvious fake, no matter how attractive you find me. This plate was caught three times last year by city cameras. Where were the tickets mailed? Who knows?

In New York State, no points are assessed against a driver's license when a driver is caught operating a car with fake or covered plates. Currently, the maximum fine is just \$200, which most drivers think is just the cost of doing business, given how rarely they're caught.

Additionally, camera-issued tickets do not carry points — even though 10s of thousands of drivers have accumulated enough tickets to have their license revoked ... if the tickets were written by an officer instead of a camera. Drivers simply evade accountability by paying the \$50 tickets.

Efforts to tighten the rules have failed. In 2022, a state senator wanted the Department of Motor Vehicles to inform insurance companies of drivers getting excessive tickets and to allow speed camera tickets to count on a driver's record.

But those safety provisions were eliminated from the final bill; drivers said they found such accountability too "punitive." Whatever happened to "Safety first"? So often, safety is far down on the list of legislative priorities.

Fortunately, this legislature has a chance to add teeth to existing laws outlawing defacing or obscuring one's plate. That is, unless you capitulate to reckless drivers who are targeting our children and our neighbors and our friends.

I'm happy to answer any questions. Thanks.