



Providence Noise Project

"Noise is the New Smoking"

March 12, 2024

Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island House of Representatives
82 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02903

We are writing to express our support for **House Bill 7368 — Automated Traffic Violation Monitoring Systems: Noise Limits**. As residents of Providence unwillingly exposed to a daily roar of noise from various sources, we know that one of the most prevalent is motor vehicles.

Among the sources most often-cited via the Noise Project's online [Community Noise Survey](#) and contact forms are **non-compliant mufflers** — a few of which are inadvertently damaged, while most are deliberately disabled / designed to make more noise — and **over-amplified car stereos**, which involve packing vehicles with speakers to blast the city as they drive around.

According to a recent survey conducted on behalf of Mayor Brett Smiley's administration, 40 percent of Providence residents said they are dissatisfied to some degree with the "lack of respect for noise ordinances" in our city. That sensibility is further borne out by the combined **5,600 noise complaints the Providence Police received in 2023** from every ward in the city.

Yet as a late 2023 [Providence Journal article](#) documented, of the 5,500 noise complaints the Providence Police received the year before, they issued only 19 citations in response — for the entire year. And of those scandalously rare citations, *two were for non-compliant mufflers* and 10 were for excessively loud music — *from vehicles!*

Clearly, the city needs to be more proactive in addressing these mobile noise sources, which can be heard throughout the city both day and night. But in the absence of the manpower to do so, residents are desperate for other means to reduce the scourge of deliberate vehicle noise.

For this reason, we are gratified that Mayor Brett Smiley announced that Providence seeks to join Newport — as well as **major U.S. cities such as Chicago, Miami, NY City, and Knoxville, TN**, and around the world (**London, Paris, Barcelona**, and others) — as the second Rhode Island city to deploy noise cameras as a means of reducing mobile noise.

A few noise denialists try to dismiss excessive sound levels as "merely" a quality-of-life issue, as if that alone is not a sufficient basis to address it. But in fact excessive noise has been identified as a major public-health issue: The World Health Organization designated noise as **the second-most serious environmental threat to health after air pollution**.

That can't simply be ignored in the name of someone's personal lifestyle choice — especially when they're subjecting those around them to it unwillingly. As the Noise Project's slogan says, **"Noise is the new smoking."** And just as the adverse health effects of smoking were under-appreciated 50 years ago, scientific research has demonstrated a similar need to protect *everyone* from excessive noise, from young children whose are particularly sensitive to its impacts, to workers deprived of vital sleep, to senior citizens at heightened risk of dementia.

In addition to public health, there are practical reasons to pass H-7368 and allow communities throughout Rhode Island to deploy noise cameras as a means of addressing noise:

- Noise cameras are not meaningfully different from speed cameras, red-light cameras, and license-plate readers already deployed on Providence and Rhode Island streets. Like other forms of air pollution, monitoring the public environment for unhealthy, and illegal pollutants — in this case, excessive sound levels — does not represent a qualitative change in the current use of technology in motor-vehicle code enforcement or air-quality analysis.
- Noise cameras allow Rhode Island communities to detect and deter *illegal* noise levels without having to divert law-enforcement officers from other enforcement duties — or add additional personnel — to implement an important public policy initiative, and thus they represent a low-cost solution to a long-standing and demonstrated enforcement need.
- Noise cameras alleviate concerns about potentially discriminatory motor-vehicle code enforcement through the use of unbiased technology. Noise cameras can't identify or photograph vehicles until their sensors are triggered by excessive sound levels, so the potential for human bias — for example, the driver or passenger's appearance, the type of sound being generated, the theoretical use of other code violations as a pretext to stop a vehicle) cannot factor into the decision to capture a vehicle's license-plate information.

According to §11-45.1-1 of the Rhode Island General Law, "It is hereby declared to be the policy of the state to prohibit unreasonable, excessive and annoying noise levels from all sources subject to its police power." It therefore clearly falls within the state's police power to enable local communities — and indeed, the state itself — to deploy noise cameras for the purpose of implementing the aforesaid state policy, and curtailing unreasonable noise.

There is no legitimate public purpose for a relatively small group of people, many of whom are not even state residents, to disrupt the well-being of those of us who actually live here. We therefore ask the Judiciary Committee to pass H-7368 to allow individual Rhode Island cities and towns — and the long-suffering residents therein — to take reasonable steps to end the scourge of mobile noise and return our communities to the peaceful and healthy places they once were.

Thank you.

[Submitted on behalf of the Providence Noise Project]