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California Supreme Court Backs Red-Light Traffic Cameras.

SAN FRANCISCO — The California Supreme Court has ruled that images captured by traffic cameras are valid evidence against drivers who run red lights, in a victory for law enforcement over the use of the cameras that have often been met with public distrust.

The decision on Thursday, involving the case of a Los Angeles-area woman who sought to challenge a traffic ticket, ruled that pictures by automated cameras taken of motorists who enter an intersection on a red light can be legally presumed as accurate unless proven otherwise.

Critics say automated traffic cameras are more of a revenue-generating gimmick for local governments than effective tools for public safety.

The case involved a Los Angeles County woman who sought to appeal a \$436 ticket she received after a traffic camera photographed her running a red light in the city of Inglewood.

Carmen Goldsmith argued that evidence from traffic camera images was a form of hearsay, but the court dismissed the claim by saying that hearsay could be committed only by a human, not a camera.

Goldsmith's defense attorney sought to bring in the camera's manufacturer for testimony about its dependability, but Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye said that was unnecessary.

"We have long approved the substantive use of photographs as essentially a silent witness to the content of the photographs," she wrote in the decision.

Several local governments in California have stopped using cameras because of legal battles that arose when residents contested the validity of their tickets, said attorney Patrick Santos, who submitted a brief in support Goldsmith.

Santos said he expects to see a resurgence in traffic cameras across California as a result of the decision.

"They have green lit the red-light traffic ticket cases," he said. "These companies are going to triple."

The American Civil Liberties Union, which does not oppose the use of the cameras for traffic law enforcement, has raised concerns about how it could affect people's privacy rights.

"These cameras have the potential to collect an enormous amount of data," said Will Matthews, a spokesman for a California arm of the ACLU. "If law enforcement were to use the data for something unrelated, are they required to obtain a warrant? Because the public really needs assurance that technology like this is not going to be used in a way that would violate peoples' privacy rights."

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