TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF H.3306 AND S.2147
AN ACT TO IMPROVE OUTDOOR LIGHTING, CONSERVE ENERGY,
AND INCREASE DARK-SKY VISIBILITY
BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS, UTILITIES, AND ENERGY
SEPTEMBER 29, 2021

The Massachusetts Medical Society wishes to be recorded in support of H.3306 and S.2147, identical bills that would limit excess lighting produced by outdoor lighting fixtures.

Much of the light generated by roadway and security lighting never achieves its intended purpose. It never lights anyone’s way, or produces any security, visibility, or guidance to anyone. Instead, it shines straight up into the sky. In contrast, well-designed lighting illuminates the ground without the overuse of energy and without being a burden or a nuisance to the environment or other people and property. The most straightforward means to create a glare-free nighttime environment is to utilize fully-shielded lighting fixtures which emit all of their light downward (below the horizontal) and none of it directly up into the sky.

While there are significant energy savings and environmental advantages to adopting fully shielded lighting fixtures, the MMS is particularly concerned about the medical and safety implications of the current unfettered outdoor lighting. Poorly designed lighting causes harsh glare that blinds and distracts drivers, especially in bad weather and for drivers with poor visibility – this disparately affects our older patients, particularly those with cataracts. Thus, many individuals are faced with the choice of driving under unsafe conditions or severely limiting their mobility at night due to unnecessary and easily preventable glare. This bill would be a positive step in remedying this problem.

This bill would encourage energy-efficient lighting practices throughout the Commonwealth by requiring the use of fully-shielded exterior lighting in new or replacement installations, and to install that lighting only where it is needed. These steps will result in lowered energy consumption and less glare.

The bill would apply only to new or replacement lighting installations — existing lighting (such as municipal streetlights) would not be affected, and provisions are included to permit waivers when deemed necessary by special circumstances. It would not add to project costs, because well-designed, fully-shielded lighting is now commonly available from a wide range of manufacturers.

The MMS support for these bills is consistent with the American Medical Association’s (AMA) advisory on street lighting that states: All street lighting should be shielded to prevent glare to drivers, for driving safety. Improperly shielded street lights cause disability glare and impede vision, causing safety hazards. Review of published studies has shown that as the eye ages, it becomes much more sensitive to disability glare, impairing safe driving.

We urge the Committee to report H.3306 and S.2147 out of Committee favorably.