

Written Testimony Opposing S.211: Extension of Vermont State Vehicle Safety Inspection Interval

To: Vermont State Senate

From: Demeny Pollitt, Owner, Girlington Garage, South Burlington

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Subject: Opposition to S.211 – Proposal to Extend State Vehicle Safety Inspection Interval

I am writing to express strong opposition to Senate Bill S.211, which proposes extending the interval between mandatory state vehicle safety inspections from one year to two. Having been in the automotive industry since 2003, receiving my inspector's license in 2006, and opening my shop in 2009, I have over twenty years of hands-on experience with Vermont's unique automotive challenges. I believe the change this bill proposes would have serious negative consequences for public safety and economic stability of our local automotive repair industry.

Vermont's climate and road conditions require our hard-working teams at VTrans and the town highway crews to combat snow and ice with the most effective tools they can access, brine being one of them. While brine has proven to be more effective for road safety, it has also proven to be more damaging to vehicles than solid rock salt. Due to its liquid form, it easily coats our vehicle's frames, suspension, steering and brakes, causing rapid, widespread and accelerated corrosion. Manufacturers like Toyota have sent engineers to local dealerships, such as Heritage on Shelburne Road, specifically to study the unprecedented rust issues Vermont faces. The rate of damage that rust causes to the safety components of our vehicles is shocking and cannot be understated.

Unfortunately, it's impossible to look at the majority of the suspension and steering components, as well as brake and cooling lines, and be able to say when they're likely to fail. These parts are safe and working until they're not. A ball joint (the part that holds your steering knuckle to the frame of the vehicle), is tight until it's loose. The wheel bearing (the part which attaches your wheel to the steering knuckle) is inside of the knuckle - we can't even look at it. We have to wait until we can feel with our hands that it's loose. Struts (the part that keeps your wheel pressed down onto the ground as much as possible) are strong and dry, until an interior seal fails, and then they're leaking.

Technicians are highly skilled workers who can identify currently dangerous safety concerns. But they can't see into the future. They can't tell us if a car will be safe for two

years. Brake lines can fail in two years. Tire rod ends (the part that attaches your wheel to the steering wheel), can fail in two years. Anything can fail in two years.

With oil change intervals being what they are these days, we have a lot of vehicles that only come to us once/year because they are due for state inspection. If the inspection interval is changed to two years, these cars might not come in for that entire two years.

Not only will unsafe cars be driving around on our roads, but the costs required to pass state inspections after two years will skyrocket for many drivers. Again, Vermont roads are hard on our vehicles. Things will still break, even if we're not looking for them. And those things, unaddressed, will cause other things to break. The failures can build up over time, and after two years it'll cost a fortune to get these cars back to safe.

Safety isn't the only thing to consider when making this change. Many people have a hard time having to pay for required repairs for state inspection as it is. A year's worth of repairs is a devastating necessity. For those people, two years' worth of repairs will be an impossibility. They will either lose their transportation, or they'll go into debt paying for repairs or buying a new vehicle they can't afford.

Finally, the extended intervals between required inspections will have a significant financial effect on small, independent automotive repair shops as well. About 30% of our repair orders are created due to state inspections, for a total revenue of just under \$445,000.00 (this includes the repairs needed to pass inspection). State inspections are a major source of revenue for every inspection station in Vermont, many of whom have larger shops than mine and so have more employees depending on them. Not only are we likely to have a dead year while everyone very happily waits until they are due for inspection again, but once the inspections start up again, the financial impact of the lost work due to the inflated cost of two years' worth of repairs being needed at once will be significant.

Vermont's harsh conditions demand vigilant oversight of vehicle safety. Extending the inspection interval to two years will increase the risks, raise costs and undermine small businesses. I urge the Senate to reject S.211 and maintain the annual inspection requirement to protect Vermonters and small businesses.