



INDIANA PROSECUTING ATTORNEYS COUNCIL

302 W. Washington Street, Room E-205

Indianapolis, IN 46204-2767

www.in.gov/ipac

Phone: (317) 232-1836

Fax: (317) 233-3599

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Marshall County Prosecutor Advocates for Use of Drones for Vehicle Accident Reconstruction

Marshall County Prosecuting Attorney E. Nelson Chipman, Jr., testified in support for the use of aerial drones by law enforcement agencies in the reconstruction of accident sites, January 13, before a committee of the Indiana House of Representatives.

The Courts and Criminal Code Committee was hearing House Bill 1013 that concerns geolocation (GPS) information for law enforcement agencies, sponsored by Rep. Eric Koch who represents a portion of south central Indiana.

Prosecutor Chipman told the members of the Committee that his office recently purchased drones for use by law enforcement officers when it became apparent that a major use for the drones would be for vehicle accident reconstruction. However, after research of applicable statutes, he discovered that a search warrant is normally required for use of drones by law enforcement.

“Presently at a crash scene, an officer can take all the photos he wants as long as he is standing on the ground, but is prohibited from taking photos by the use of a drone looking down from an altitude of 20 feet at the same intersection,” noted Prosecutor Chipman in support of the legislative proposal. He told the committee: “there are exceptions to current law, however, that allow use of drones without a warrant and we would ask that the use of drones for accident reconstruction to be added as an exception.” He said that many other states allow photos and video by drones at vehicle crash sites.

Prosecutor Chipman also thanked Rep. Koch for authoring this important legislation. “Without use of drone technology for accident reconstruction in the Indiana code, the admissibility of photos and videos could be an issue,” he said.

The proposal was approved by the committee, with amendments, and will go to the full House for further consideration.

About the Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council: The IPAC is a non-partisan, independent state judicial branch agency that supports Indiana's 91 prosecuting attorneys and their chief deputies. It is governed by a 10-member board of directors of elected prosecuting attorneys. The IPAC assists prosecuting attorneys in the preparation of manuals, legal research and training seminars. It serves as a liaison to local, state, and federal agencies, study commissions, and community groups in an effort to support law enforcement and promote the fair administration of justice.

Media contact: Connie Smith, Public Affairs Officer, 317-233-3923, cosmith1@ipac.in.gov