

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
RHODE ISLAND TRAFFIC TRIBUNAL

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND	:	
	:	
v.	:	C.A. No. M26-0001
	:	25404501332
	:	
RASHARN LYNCH	:	

DECISION

PER CURIAM: Before this Panel on May 20, 2026—Magistrate Abilheira (Chair), Chief Magistrate DiSandro, and Administrative Magistrate DiChiro—is the appeal of Rasharn Lynch (Appellant) from a decision of Judge Gomes of the East Providence Municipal Court, sustaining the charged violation of Rhode Island G.L. 1956 § 31-15-12 “Interval Between Vehicles – Following Too Close.” Appellant appeared *pro se* before this Panel. Jurisdiction is pursuant to G.L. 1956 § 31-41.1-8. For reasons set forth in this Decision, Appellant’s appeal is denied.

I

Facts and Travel

On November 22, 2025, Patrol Officer Ryan Czajka (Officer Czajka) of the East Providence Police Department charged Mr. Lynch with violating R.I. Gen. Laws § 31-15-12 “Interval Between Vehicles – Following Too Close.” Appellant appeared at East Providence Municipal Court on January 8, 2026 and plead not guilty. As such, the matter was scheduled for trial for February 19, 2026.

During trial, Officer Czajka testified that on November 22, 2025 at approximately 5:46 P.M., he was at a stationary traffic post in that area of 975 Warren Avenue. *See* Tr. 5: 5-10. He observed a Gray 2023 Nissan Altima bearing a Massachusetts registration plate, 6TXF78, traveling eastbound past his location following too closely to the vehicle in front of it. He testified the Altima

was traveling at an estimated 30 MPH, with approximately half a car length between the vehicle in front of it. *Id.* He identified the operator of the Altima as Rasharn Lynch.

At trial, Appellant testified in his own defense. Appellant argued that he could not have been tailgating the vehicle in front of him because if he was, he would have hit the vehicle in front of him. Tr. 21: 22-24. Further, Appellant argued at trial that Officer Czajka was not posted in a position where the Officer could have viewed him from behind. Tr. 21: 17-19.

Upon hearing all the evidence, the Trial Judge found that the City proved by clear and convincing evidence that Appellant violated G.L. 1956 § 31-15-12 “Interval Between Vehicles – Following Too Close.” Tr. 37: 18-28. Aggrieved by the decision, Appellant filed this timely appeal.

II

Standard of Review

Pursuant to § 31-41.1-8, the Appeals Panel of the Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal (RITT) possesses appellate jurisdiction to review an order of a judge or magistrate. Section 31-41.1-8(f) provides in pertinent part:

“The appeals panel shall not substitute its judgment for that of the judge or magistrate as to the weight of the evidence on questions of fact. The appeals panel may affirm the decision of the judge or magistrate, or it may remand the case for further proceedings or reverse or modify the decision if the substantial rights of the appellant have been prejudiced because the judge’s findings, inferences, conclusions or decisions are:

- (1) In violation of constitutional or statutory provisions;
- (2) In excess of the statutory authority of the judge or magistrate;
- (3) Made upon unlawful procedure;
- (4) Affected by other error of law;
- (5) Clearly erroneous in view of the reliable, probative, and substantial evidence on the whole record; or

- (6) Arbitrary or capricious or characterized by abuse of discretion or clearly unwarranted exercise of discretion.”

In reviewing a hearing judge or magistrate’s decision pursuant to § 31-41.1-8, this Panel “lacks the authority to assess witness credibility or to substitute its judgment for that of the hearing judge [or magistrate] concerning the weight of the evidence on questions of fact.” *Link v. State*, 633 A.2d 1345, 1348 (R.I. 1993) (citing *Liberty Mutual Insurance Co. v. Janes*, 586 A.2d 536, 537 (R.I. 1991)). “The review of the appeals panel is confined to a reading of the record to determine whether the judge’s [or magistrate’s] decision is supported by legally competent evidence or is affected by an error of law.” *Id.* (citing *Environmental Scientific Corp. v. Durfee*, 621 A.2d 200, 208 (R.I. 1993)). “In circumstances in which the appeals panel determines that the decision is ‘[c]learly erroneous in view of the reliable, probative, and substantial evidence on the whole record,’ or is affected by ‘error of law,’ it may remand, reverse, or modify the decision.” *Id.* “Otherwise, it must affirm the hearing judge’s [or magistrate’s] conclusions” on appeal. *Id.*; see *Janes*, 586 A.2d at 537.

III

Analysis

Appellant argues on appeal that the Trial Judge erred in finding Officer Czajka’s testimony to be credible. Upon review of the evidence provided, this Appeal Panel finds that the Trial Judge did not err in finding Officer Czajka’s testimony to be credible, nor did she err in finding that the City proved through clear and convincing evidence that Appellant violated G.L. 1956 § 31-15-12 “Interval Between Vehicles – Following Too Close.”

G.L. 1956 § 31-15-12 “Interval Between Vehicles – Following Too Close” states, “[t]he driver of a motor vehicle shall not follow another vehicle more closely than is reasonable and prudent, having due regard for the speed of the vehicles and the traffic upon and the condition of

the highway, and shall, whenever traveling through a business or residential district, and whenever traffic permits, leave sufficient space so that an overtaking vehicle may enter and occupy the space without danger. . .”

At trial, Officer Czajka testified that he observed the Appellant following the vehicle in front of him too closely. Officer Czajka, based on his training, testified that the standard for maintaining distance should be “approximately one vehicle length per 10 miles per hour” which would be *at least* 3 vehicles away from the vehicle in front of the Appellant based on his estimated speed of 30 MPH. However, Appellant’s vehicle was only a half car length from the vehicle in front of it. Tr. 5: 5-10. Moreover, by the Appellant’s own admission, he was only a “tire” length from the vehicle in front of him. Tr. 29: 3-6. Therefore, the Trial Court’s finding of guilt of G.L. 1956 § 31-15-12 “Interval Between Vehicles – Following Too Close” was supported by the credible testimony of Officer Czajka, because the statute requires “sufficient space” for another vehicle to enter without danger. Tr. 38: 11-13.

This Panel “lacks the authority to assess witness credibility or to substitute its judgment for that of the hearing judge concerning the weight of the evidence on questions of fact.” *Link*, 633 A.2d at 1348 (citing *Janes*, 586 A.2d at 537). As the members of this Panel did not have an opportunity to observe the live testimony of Officer Czajka, it would be impermissible to second-guess the Trial Judge’s impression as she was able to “appraise [the] witness[’s] demeanor and to take into account other realities that cannot be grasped from a reading of a cold record.” *A. Salvati Masonry Inc. v. Andreozzi*, 151 A.3d 745, 749 (R.I. 2017) (internal quotations omitted).

Accordingly, based on a review of the record, this Panel is satisfied that the Trial Magistrate did not abuse her discretion and her decision to sustain the charged violation is “supported by

legally competent evidence.” *Id.* (citing *Envtl. Scientific Corp. v. Durfee*, 621 A.2d 200, 208 (R.I. 1993)).

IV

Conclusion

This Panel has reviewed the entire record in this matter. Having done so, the members of this Panel are satisfied that the Trial Magistrate’s decision was neither clearly erroneous in view of the reliable, probative, and substantial evidence on the whole record nor arbitrary or capricious or characterized by abuse of discretion or clearly unwarranted exercise of discretion. Accordingly, Appellant’s appeal is denied.

ENTERED:

_____/S/_____
Magistrate Abilheira (Chair)

_____/S/_____
Chief Magistrate DiSandro

_____/S/_____
Administrative Magistrate DiChiro

DATE: August 19, 2026