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State Police upgrade citation system

■ Cross-referencing expected to reduce mistakes

By Tom Searls
Staff writer

Getting a traffic ticket in West Virginia will never be the same again.

State Police have moved to a computerized system that ties citations issued by troopers into magistrate court systems around the state and the state Division of Motor Vehicles.

They plan to share it with municipal and county law enforcement agencies so all citations are written to form and sent on to the next stop, be it court or the DMV.

Residents should find fewer mistakes and less wiggle room to get out of the tickets.

"The DMV tosses about 300 tickets a month because they're not certain they got the right driver," State Police Lt. Chuck Zerkle told members of the House of Delegates Judiciary Committee Friday.

Since November, State Police across the state have upgraded software and computers with a program that allows troopers to fill out electronic forms that are then automatically transferred to magistrate courts and the DMV. So far, they have used the new software only in crash investigations.

That's because state law requires those receiving a police citation to sign the ticket. State Police want lawmakers to change that portion of the law to make the new system legally workable.

Soon, police officers will print out a citation at the scene that is clearly marked as a court summons across the bottom, Zerkle said.

The computer forms have a section for investigating officers to file their reports and not have access to the court or DMV forms. Likewise, those two agencies will have access to make changes only to their areas of the form.

If residents want to purchase a copy of a crash report, for example, a trooper will swipe their credit or debit card in his laptop computer. "We'll e-mail it to them," Zerkle said.

He and a cohort also emphasized to lawmakers that State Police came upon the idea while trying to find a quick method to complete racial profiling information that lawmakers have insisted they retrieve.

"It shows how something controversial can be real helpful," said Delegate Barbara Fleischauer, D-Monongalia.

State Police also plan to make the computer information available to residents. Computer access points will be established across the state and residents will be able to get information, such as where every crash in the state occurred.

"They're going to be able to see every city, county and state crash that occurs in West Virginia," Zerkle said.

To contact staff writer Tom Searls, use e-mail or call 348-5198.
