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Got a Ticket? Who're You Going to Call?

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When Glen Bolofsky talks about parking tickets, the treble in his voice begins to rise, adjectives turn to epithets, and his mood, a former accountant's natural calm, flashes to anger.

"It's just despicable, absolutely despicable," he said recently about the increasing number of blinding orange parking tickets slipped under the windshield wipers of cars over the last fiscal year, and called the agency that oversees parking violations, the city's Department of Finance, a "draconian bully" 1061 1144 1115 1156 that "abuses New Yorker's basic rights under the law" to close the budget gap.

The system is seen as so frequently unfair, head-scratchingly confusing, and downright faulty, Mr. Bolofsky has banked his own living on it, earning himself a pesky reputation from city parking tsars that curse him as public enemy #1.

The 48-year old accountant from Forest Hill, Queens, now living in New Jersey, runs a company out of an office suite in Paramus called parkingticket.com. Over the last 20 years, employing former traffic cops and administrative parking judges as consultants, Mr. Bolofsky estimates that he's beaten 300,000 parking tickets on behalf of clients - or, \$21 million worth.

And the city management report released by Mayor Bloomberg on Wednesday should do little to hinder Mr. Bolofsky's business. The report discloses that the increased fleet of 300 additional traffic cops had dished out a near-target 10 million parking tickets over the last fiscal year, a 20% increase from 2003, and netting the city over \$100 million more in fines.

According to Mr. Bolofsky, the bulk of those tickets are dismissible, and for anyone who wants to beat a parking ticket, or make a glove-compartment stuffed with a litter of discarded orange paper disappear, he claims that 70 to 75% of all parking tickets can be tossed out for technical-glitch snafus made by traffic cops.

You can fight a parking ticket through the city's "biased" system of hearings and appeals, Mr. Bolofsky said, or, making his pitch, he said you could also follow the user-friendly steps on his Web site, punch in basic information, such as registration numbers, car descriptions, etc., and his system spits out a letter of protest guaranteed to outflank the parking tsars at the city's finance department and have your fine dropped.

For the letter of protest, he charges half the cost of your ticket up front - and, should it fail, and after the company later exhausts all attempts of appeal, your money is returned. So, in essence, the ticketee is forced to make a decision: either pay half the price of their parking ticket to Mr. Bolofsky so he can work to have it dropped - or pay the full fine to the city to keep themselves from becoming a distinguished member of the scofflaw society.

The answer, according to Mr. Bolofsky, "is a no-brainer."

The answer, according to finance department officials, is that Mr. Bolofsky's entire operation is overly opportunistic and that his populist parking rhetoric is sugarcoating for a business that could soon be out of

business once the city's new, electronic, \$2,100 hand-held parking ticket dispensers are handed off to as many as 2,000 traffic agents early next year.

Since the city began using the high-tech gizmos this January, officials have claimed error rates made by traffic cops have gone to 1% from 10%, an actual decrease of an estimated 90,000 error-riddled tickets.

And a city without errors on tickets, one city official suggested, could also be a city without parkingticket.com.

Not so, said Mr. Bolofsky, who disputes the city's numbers regarding the hand-held devices. He claims he and his staff of 10 have had well over a thousand computerized tickets dismissed so far because "humans run the computers, and humans make all kinds of mistakes."

A spokeswoman for the finance department, Joanna Perlman, declined to discuss the impact of Mr. Bolofsky's business on the city and described parkingticket.com as nothing more than a shameless way to profiteer off the finance department's own on-line service for disputing tickets, which is available for free.

According to the city's own figures, it's worth challenging a ticket because, chances are, it will be dropped or reduced. Of all contested tickets, about 40% are dismissed, while 30% are reduced.

"We give you a few shots at the apple," Ms. Perlman said, about contesting tickets.

Not enough shots, according to Mr. Bolofsky, who argued that the agency's own budget figures show that the overall mission is to hand out as many tickets as possible, even though many may be "improper."

Examine the back of any parking ticket, he said. Look at the fine print.

Each ticket warns a person they have 30 days before facing a default judgment.

In fact, a person has four times as long, 120 days, to respond before facing a default judgment, according to Ms. Perlman.

Mr. Bolofsky called the discrepancy one in a string of "bullying tactics" the city has used to "mislead" car drivers and get them to pay fines quickly.

"Whenever you get a parking ticket you should treat it like you've just been mugged," he said, "because in many ways, you just have."

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