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Free With Registration: Niche Firm Pursues Traffic Ticket Market at Full Speed

By [Thomas Adcock](#)
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Matthew J. Weiss
Rick Kopstein/New York Law Journal

A self-described "typical 18-year-old motorist" with a hot new Jeep, young Matthew J. Weiss racked up so many traffic tickets in the '80s that he was driven to throw himself on the mercy of the court.

What he learned - "Pleading guilty is not the way to go" - inevitably led to where he is today at age 46: head of his own Manhattan niche firm, Weiss & Associates, specialists in fighting traffic tickets.

Mr. Weiss' firm is familiar to listeners of radio ads touting his success rate and his catchy phone number, 888-RED-LIGHT, which may seem an unlikely follow-up to what he calls "ivory tower-type work" during the initial four years of his legal career.

Upon graduation from Hofstra University School of Law, he became an attorney with the Court of Appeals in Albany, after which Mr. Weiss did appellate work as an associate at what was then known as Rivkin, Radler, Bayh, Hart & Kremer in Uniondale.

"I'm a capitalist at heart and I wanted to make a good living," said Mr. Weiss in an interview. "I wanted to run a business. Also I wanted to feel good about helping people."

Accordingly, he hung out his shingle in 1991, with the notion that hard-won youthful experience in traffic court would serve him well. He reckoned the time was right for such an attempt because "I was still young, I didn't have a kid or a wife or a mortgage."

He has all those now, as well as a payroll that includes one associate, four support staffers and 20 of counsels scattered around the state.

For a flat fee of \$350, Mr. Weiss or his designee will go to court to cut a deal, in attempts to reduce damages to the pocketbook of the average motorist stuck with a moving violation. The fee, Mr. Weiss maintains, could prove provident.

Should the motorist be charged with the quite common offense of speeding at 76 miles per hour in a 55 zone, for instance, punishment only begins with the \$150 fine. Next come the bipartisan add-ons.

Thanks to former Governor Mario M. Cuomo, a Democrat, a mandatory surcharge of \$50 on top of the \$150 fine goes to the municipality in which the offense occurred. And thanks to former Governor George E. Pataki, a Republican, our state collects a "driver

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assessment fee" of \$300.

In addition, 76 in a 55 zone costs six points on a driver's record (of 11 points maximum), thereby immediately and dramatically boosting insurance rates.

A fair chunk of Mr. Weiss' practice is defending owners of truck and delivery van fleets, usually at a flat fee of \$500 for what are usually multi-ticket pull-overs involving infractions beyond the underlying alleged offense such as axle imbalance, excess cargo weight and improper trailer length.

Traffic tickets, said Mr. Weiss, serve the state of New York as "revenue raisers, primarily" and are adjudicated by courts that "sometimes make it as inconvenient as possible to contend the charges against you."

Mr. Weiss counseled, "Always fight your case, even if you're guilty. The People have the burden. To grease the wheels of the system, [the People] will make deals, even if they have a good case against you."

As for life in the traffic violations bar, the foregoing feistiness is as close to raising blood pressure as it ever gets - at least at Weiss & Associates, which declines to handle serious offenses such as vehicular manslaughter.

"The stress is low," said Mr. Weiss. "I mean, what are we talking about? It's only a ticket."

And when did Mr. Weiss himself last run afoul of the rules of the road?

"Six months ago. Failure to signal," he said. "I told the officer, sheepishly, 'I'm a traffic attorney and I'm embarrassed to be in this position.'"

The officer, Mr. Weiss added, "was kind enough to let me walk."

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