



BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Hispanic/Latino Quality of Life Resource Advisory Commission

Recommendation Number: (20250826-005): Opposition to Automated License Plate Reader Programs

Recommendation

The Hispanic/Latino Quality of Life Resource Advisory Commission urges City Council to reject any future proposals to implement automated (A.I.) license plate reader (ALPR) surveillance programs.

Description of Recommendation to Council

Although the trial period for the Austin Police Department's use of automated (A.I.) license plate readers ended earlier this summer, Council must listen to the people of Austin and protect their privacy and safety by rejecting any future proposals to implement any A.I. surveillance technology. It is the recommendation of the Hispanic/Latino Quality of Life Resource Advisory Committee that Council reject any future proposals to fund or implement ALPRs.

Rationale:

From March through December of 2024, automated license plate readers (ALPR) scanned more than 75 million license plates across Austin as part of an APD trial program. While Council's approved policy stated that license plate data must be deleted within one week, that was not the reality of the program. According to a recent audit, contractor Flock Safety retained "non-exclusive, worldwide, perpetual, royalty-free right and license" to indefinitely use license plate information scanned across Austin.¹

What this means is that the data connected to the millions of license plates scanned under this program were not protected. This program puts the data of Austinites at risk. Consider what Texas State Senator Sarah Eckhardt, who represents much of Austin, said on the floor of the Texas Senate just last week during the hearing for HB521: "We're in the process of creating a number of lists, and this is of great concern. We have a number of bills this session... that create lists of people as if we are preparing to shoot fish in a barrel... We have lists of individuals who are public servants who are trying to assist people to vote. We have lists of judges who are using

¹<https://communityimpact.com/austin/south-central-austin/government/2025/05/20/75m-license-plate-scanned-under-rebooted-austin-police-program-audit-reveals-successes-concerns/>

their discretion to release people on bail. We have lists of prosecutors who are – within their discretion – choosing not to pursue cases. We have lists of vendors who sell books that are disfavored. We are entering into a time period of surveillance and lists and disfavored groups by statute... We had a priority in this legislative session to look at the scourges of communism. That was one of the scourges of communism. Lists of public servants that were disfavored, lists of judges that were disfavored, lists of books that were disfavored, lists of people who were living in ways that were disfavored, lists of religious practices that were disfavored. This is going to be the legacy of this legislature?” The City of Austin is deeply familiar with the realities of pre-emption by the State. Under an ALPR program, we cannot promise our residents that their license plate data will be safe from the lists the State is creating that Senator Eckhardt mentioned. The State of Texas has already expressed explicit interest in and/or made efforts to track those who help pregnant people access abortions, those who have changed their gender marker, and those who are pursuing citizenship. All of these groups are susceptible to being tracked by the State using the data collected under Austin’s ALPR program. WIRED reported back in 2022 on the ways in which ALPR programs can specifically be used to track those who travel for abortions or who provide abortion care.² On May 29, 2025 it was reported that the Johnson County Sheriff’s Office in Texas used ALPR cameras from the same company that Austin uses, Flock, to track a woman who had a self-managed abortion as she drove from Texas across the country.³

There remains a risk that the State figures out a way to compel local police forces to act as ICE agents (see: SB8), helping carry out the current presidential administration’s goal of mass deportations. According to Texas Policy Research, A.I.-powered surveillance platforms are “often deployed in predictive policing and immigration enforcement, [integrating] facial recognition, license plate reader data, social media activity, and geolocation data into threat scores and behavioral profiles. These systems are already being used by ICE and local police departments, including through covert partnerships like the one Palantir ran in New Orleans without public knowledge.”⁴ Concerns around the dangers of using this technology are not new, either. In 2015, then-Governor of Louisiana Bobby Jindal vetoed a statewide ALPR program stating, “Camera programs such as these that make private information readily available beyond the scope of law enforcement, pose a fundamental risk to personal privacy and create large pools of information belonging to law abiding citizens that unfortunately can be extremely vulnerable to theft or misuse.”⁵ There is also the risk of vulnerable populations being mistakenly pulled over due to errors in the use of the ALPR systems, as was the case for a mother and her family in Aurora, Colorado. According to a report by CBS News, her family were “pulled over at gunpoint and forced to lie face down on hot pavement. Again, ALPR technology was central to the stop.

²<https://www.wired.com/story/license-plate-reader-alpr-surveillance-abortion/>

³<https://www.404media.co/a-texas-cop-searched-license-plate-cameras-nationwide-for-a-woman-whogot-an-abortion/>

⁴<https://www.texaspolicyresearch.com/mass-surveillance-in-texas-the-hidden-dangers-of-license-plate-tracking/>

⁵ <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2024/06/new-alpr-vulnerabilities-prove-mass-surveillance-public-safety-threat>

Police mistakenly flagged their Colorado license plate as matching that of a completely different vehicle from a different state — a stolen motorcycle registered in Montana. The incident, captured on video and widely condemned, led to a \$1.9 million settlement from the city in 2024.”⁶ Were this to happen to a mixed status family, it could lead tax-paying and law-abiding members of society being unjustly thrust into the deportation pipeline for no reason other than one license plate number being incorrectly entered into the ALPR database.

The Hispanic/Latino Quality of Life Resource Advisory Commission is concerned about all the ways that the ALPR program could be used to surveil and expose vulnerable populations – immigrant populations, those seeking abortions or helping others to do so, and protesters, for starters. We are concerned with the way this type of A.I. surveillance will render previously protected spaces unsafe for our residents. This Commission urges Council to reject any future ALPR surveillance programs in order to protect the privacy of our most vulnerable residents.

Date of Approval: _____

Record of the vote:

Attest: _____

(Staff or board member can sign)

⁶ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/license-plate-readers-alpr-mistakes/>