

SENT VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

April 12, 2024

RE: ACLU of Washington Public Comment on CCTV, AGLS, and RTCC

Dear Mayor Harrell, Council President Nelson, Technology Committee Chair Hollingsworth, and Honorable City Councilmembers:



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Michele Storms
Executive Director

The ACLU of Washington would like to express our concerns regarding the City’s intent to acquire and/or expand the use of three surveillance technologies: CCTV, an acoustic gunshot location system (AGLS), and real-time crime center (RTCC) software. These technologies pose grave risks to people’s civil rights and liberties and will not accomplish the goal of preventing violent crime. We are also concerned that the current review process for these technologies has not been sufficiently thorough, transparent, or equitable as per the Racial Equity Toolkit (RET) and the Seattle Surveillance Ordinance (SSO).

A few of the demonstrated issues with these technologies include the following:

- **CCTV:** Extensive research, including a [40-year systematic review](#), shows that CCTV does not reduce violent crime or aid in police investigations. A [recent study](#) where police officers in Newark were assigned to actively monitor and respond to CCTV camera footage concluded that such efforts required extensive resources and were “unsustainable over time.”
- **AGLS:** AGLS systems, such as ShotSpotter, have been shown to be ineffective at preventing or investigating gun violence based on extensive peer-reviewed research, including a [study](#) of 68 metropolitan U.S. counties. Adding CCTV to AGLS [does not improve](#) its accuracy, but instead increases police workload. Further, AGLS increases the risk of [police violence](#) and [wrongful arrests](#), and disproportionately harms communities of color, sometimes with [fatal consequences](#).
- **RTCC:** RTCC software, such as Fusus, incorporates both public and privately owned cameras to provide law enforcement with expanded surveillance capabilities, including the ability to access footage that would typically [require a warrant](#) while also bypassing oversight. RTCC software also regularly incorporates new

functionalities, such as AI object recognition. The introduction of new surveillance capabilities would not only require an updated surveillance impact report as per the SSO, but would also present new and unanticipated risks and harms that would be challenging to mitigate once the technology has already been deployed.

- By greatly expanding Seattle's surveillance infrastructure, all three technologies pose significant risks to privacy and other civil liberties, and could cause significant harm to BIPOC communities that have been historically overpoliced. Surveillance at this scale would enable tracking and making inferences about people's activities in granular detail. Once this data is collected, it could be accessed or misused in unforeseen ways that could have especially serious consequences for individuals that Seattle, as a sanctuary city, has sought to protect, including undocumented immigrants and people seeking abortions or gender-affirming healthcare.

We urge the City to not invest in these three technologies given the extensive research evidence that shows that they will be ineffective at preventing violent crime, and the known risks and harms surrounding their use. Instead, we recommend that the City redirects the funds for the surveillance pilot toward data-driven solutions that reduce crime both effectively and safely. For example, community-based violence intervention programs have been shown to reduce violent crime in cities across the country, including a [63% reduction](#) in shooting victimizations in New York City and a [75% reduction](#) in homicides in Charlotte.

In addition to concerns with the technologies themselves, we are also concerned with the current review process:

- As per Council Budget Action SPD-900-A, a Racial Equity Toolkit (RET) analysis must be co-prepared by the Executive's Office, the Office for Civil Rights, and the Office of the Inspector General. The RET requires the City to conduct a comprehensive review of independent research on these technologies, as well as to engage with communities that will be most impacted. We are concerned that this process has not been sufficiently robust. We urge the City to conduct meaningful public outreach and to collect feedback from impacted communities in a transparent and equitable manner that ensures their voices are heard.

- The Seattle Surveillance Ordinance established a process that City departments must follow prior to acquiring any surveillance technology, including developing a surveillance impact report (SIR) and gaining Council approval (See Ord. 125679). The SSO also established a Community Surveillance Working Group (CSWG) to advise the Executive and Council; the working group is tasked with developing a privacy and civil liberties assessment for each surveillance impact report. The City makes appointments to the CSWG, and the group is required to comprise seven members, at least five of whom must represent equity-based organizations. We are concerned that the CSWG currently only has four members, and has not been fully staffed for multiple years. Advancing the review and/or acquisition of these technologies without a fully appointed working group runs counter to the legislative intent and goals of the SSO.

Please feel free to reach out to us to discuss these issues, including ways we can work toward improving public safety in Seattle through evidence-based solutions that uplift communities rather than cause them further harm.

Sincerely,

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