

Fairfax County, Va. residents say they didn't consent to government surveillance, urge Board to end use of Automatic License Plate Readers (ALPRs)

Fairfax County - Residents are frustrated with local electeds as communities across the County are becoming aware of the implementation of AI surveillance cameras in the region. "AI enhanced cameras monitor our movements in an unprecedented manner. They document and store unique profiles of every traveler, in some cases indefinitely. Data entries can be in the billions," they say in an email addressed to the Board of Supervisors (BOS). "ALPRs are being marketed to law enforcement and lawmakers by private companies funded by Peter Thiel and other tech billionaires. They aim to create a seamless system of surveillance nationwide. These systems were implemented in Fairfax County without community consent," they explain further.

The email follows in the heels of state and national outrage to Flock, Axon, and other surveillance vendor partnerships with localities who are rapidly deploying the creepy tech throughout the United States. Concerned community members gathered over the weekend to attend a community information session hosted by Deflock Fairfax at Ravensworth Baptist Church in Annandale. The community group is composed of residents, immigrant rights advocates, faith communities, non-profits, and other local organizations. Over 100 residents came together to discuss the significant implications of ALPRs on their safety and privacy rights. Dr. Steven Keener, one of the event's guest speakers, researcher, and a Virginia professor, explained the cameras make it "almost impossible to do daily tasks, like go to work, the grocery store, childcare, etc. without your movements being documented and stored." Matthew Lofgren, one of the community group's lead organizers explained, "Virginia police departments have cancelled their ALPR contracts to include Charlottesville, Harrisonburg, Staunton, Floyd and others. This isn't a left or right issue. It's a deep concern to all types of people for very obvious reasons. Free countries don't surveil their citizens," Lofgren asserted.

ALPRs have been used to surveil people for political views, religious views, race, sexual orientation, immigration status, seeking reproductive healthcare, bearing arms and other constitutionally protected rights. ALPRs have been used to stalk women, children, and intimate partners. ALPR databases in Virginia have been accessed by federal agencies to include ICE, DHS, ATF, CBP, and other out-of-state law enforcement and government agencies—ICE alone has tapped into over 80,000 ALPRs nationwide for their "immigration" crackdown. ALPRs frequently relay false positives, misreads, and other errors that have contributed to high risk traffic stops; innocent people held at gunpoint, wrongfully accused, incarcerated, mauled, and permanently disabled.

In a BOS meeting Tuesday night, community members urged officials to "prohibit the procurement, installation, maintenance, and operation of automatic license plate recognition systems (ALPRs), terminate any contracts, cease use, and remove ALPRs from Fairfax County." Private tech companies have marketed ALPR technology to cities as a crime prevention tool, despite being a digital dragnet which collects and stores information about millions of people who have committed no crimes. Community members warned the BOS that the use of surveillance technology does not keep the public safe, rather it subsidizes a corporate mass surveillance infrastructure that creates tremendous opportunity for abuse by police, third parties, and federal agencies and puts Fairfax County residents under watch and their privacy and safety on the line. "ALPRs are a hideous example of a culture of dehumanization. Without the consent of the people, you have agreed to leap over our rights and civil liberties by allowing for this mass surveillance."

###