



ACLU of CHAMPAIGN COUNTY

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TOWN HALL STATEMENT on Automated License Plate Readers

OCTOBER 28, 2021

ACLU of Champaign County thanks Mayor Marlin, President Minnie Pearson and the NAACP volunteers, Chief Seraphin and all the city staff who have made this town hall possible. It's easy to call for transparency but someone has to do the work and we appreciate it.

The American Civil Liberties Union has traditionally expressed deep concerns with the use of ALPR technology, in part because of the risk this powerful surveillance technology poses to civil liberties and privacy, and also, importantly, because it has often been used to close off and monitor Black and brown communities, aggravating the disparity in tickets, arrests, and fines and fees.

At the same time that these communities have been over-policed, they also have seen a lack of resources from police when it comes to solving serious, violent crimes. So we are happy to see this public discussion before the City moves forward.

We live in this community and we share the pain and worry of our neighbors about this spike in violent crime. The community is asking our city government for help. Many community members are present, engaged, and willing to work together with the city and the police department to diminish gun violence. In this crucible moment, we would encourage the City to ask itself whether ALPRs are the best strategy to address our community problems. Do we believe that these cameras will meaningfully address the problem, or are they simply a panacea that will leave the community still in pain?

However one answers that question, one thing is clear – we must NOT let the resources that go to ALPRs cut off the possibility for other community-based options.

It's a community decision. But IF Urbana decides to move ahead with license plate readers for a one-year trial period, we feel strongly that:

1. **The draft police department policy regulating internal use must be clearer and stronger** in order to protect the privacy of every person who drives and parks in Urbana peacefully. We are working with the legal staff at ACLU of Illinois and will provide the police department, the

NAACP, and the Mayor and City Council with specific language for policy revisions. We will also post the suggested language on our website. It must be made perfectly clear that officers will be disciplined if they do not follow the policy rules. **We cannot support the adoption of the license plate readers without stronger safeguards in the policy.**

2. The Police Department says it will not patrol and monitor the everyday activities of Black and brown communities. But once they have this powerful technological tool, **how can we be assured they won't build a tech moat around Black and brown neighborhoods? The department should disclose the location of the ALPR technology to the public and provide timely updates if and when the locations change.**

3. **How will we measure the efficacy of the license plate readers?** We urge the community and City Council to insist upon a yearly audit and public report that tells us:

1. The operating cost of the system.
2. Its efficacy -- to what extent and how has it contributed to diminishing violent crime?
3. The outcome of the disciplinary policy -- in general terms, has the Urbana Police Department disciplined anyone for infractions of their ALPR policy, and if so, what for?
4. For what other purposes has the Police Department used license plate data?

4. If Urbana shares our HOT LIST with neighboring communities it must be done without compromising our privacy protections. **We should not share our data with any other law enforcement agency which does not abide by our policy.**

ACLU of Champaign County will continue to work to protect the civil liberties of everyone in Champaign County. Thank you.

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