Seattle
Community
Police Commission

September 4, 2025

VIA EMAIL

Dear Councilmembers,

We are writing to ask the City Council to vote against any expansion of surveillance pursuant to the CCTV and RTCC programs (Surveillance Pilot).[1] Expansion of these programs is currently scheduled for vote at City Council on September 9, 2025. We are strongly opposed to the expansion of surveillance technology while critical issues regarding privacy and civil rights remain unaddressed.

Community members are overwhelmingly against expansion. An immediate and consistent concern raised by community– and acknowledged, though not addressed, by the City Council – is the growing risk of actors outside the City misusing surveillance information against the Seattle community. By expanding, the City is breaching its commitment to scrutinize the surveillance: whether it works and its impact on civil rights during a two-year pilot before continuation or expansion.[2] Now, in the middle of the Surveillance Pilot, we lack that information necessary to weigh the risks.

Alternatively, if Council is opposed to rejecting expansion at this time, we recommend engaging more community perspective and convening an Executive Session to discuss the consequences and legal implications related to data sharing with federal agencies hostile to Washington laws that ensure gender affirming care, abortion, and immigration protections.

A. Premature Surveillance Expansion Increases Mistrust of the City and SPD

We lack the data and evidence necessary to evaluate the risks of infringement on civil rights and privacy and if the Surveillance Pilot is achieving its intended goals. Concerns raised by the CPC, OIG, and the Community Surveillance Working Group have not been addressed, and only one year into the Pilot, the two-year evaluation has not yet occurred. This information is necessary to address community concerns before expansion.

1. The City Has Not Fulfilled Its Promises to Listen to And Protect Community, Which Overwhelmingly Opposes Surveillance

Community members and community organizations remain opposed to the Surveillance Pilot. In August 2024, when the Pilot was proposed, dozens of residents spoke out in opposition, and numerous Civil Rights organizations—including the ACLU of Washington, OneAmerica, 350

Seattle, Chief Seattle Club, El Centro de la Raza, Gender Justice League, Massage Parlor Outreach Project, Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates, and WA People's Privacy—urged Council to reject it.[3]

The City's own Community Surveillance Working Group, who conducted a Privacy and Civil Liberties Impact Assessment for CCTV and RTCC, reviewed the Surveillance Impact Report (SIR) and letters from community organizations and public comments to conclude:

> "After reviewing the information, a majority of the working group ***is unsupportive of any pilot deployment of these two technologies*** as described in the SIRs. ***The amount and urgency of the concerns and outstanding questions both warrant pause on pilot deployment***…. This sentiment reflects the ***high degree of apprehension expressed by a vast majority of the public's comments[,] regarding the potential misuse*** of these technologies. These comments were overwhelmingly negative and voiced a ***serious concern and lack of trust*** within the community as a whole[.] [T]he working group believes that going forward with these acquisitions ***may serve to further erode*** with a significant portion ***the public's trust in SPD and negatively affect community relations***."[4]

At the August 12, 2025, Public Safety meeting, every community member offering public comment opposed expansion of the Surveillance Pilot. One speaker summarized the impact on our most vulnerable communities: "If we move all this data to a third-party cloud, we risk handing it over to ICE and anti-abortion states making it easier to target immigrants, women, trans people, and activists." Another explained how surveillance data is already being misused: "the President is liable to take over municipal police departments, this legislation would allow the police and whoever controls them more ability to target whoever they want...ICE is already using surveillance data like this....SPD itself has a history of biased enforcement....Council should reject all legislation that expands surveillance."

Community members also have significant concerns about the location of two of the three expansion areas to the Central District (Seattle's historically Black neighborhood, and Capitol Hill (Seattle's 2SLGBTQIA+ neighborhood, home to Cal Andersen park, home to several protests resulting in audit reviews of SPD response to protests during BLM protests and most recently, SPD's response to 2SLGBTQIA+ community protesters on May 24, 2025). Public comment from a member of Central District raised concerns about "erosion of our civil rights" and the "disparate impact on minority youth." A queer Capitol Hill resident "who's everyday life will be documented by these cameras" summarized the consequences: "good governance depends on policy data.... Expanding the program without waiting for information is a huge gamble of precious City resources.... When councilmembers wipe away the testimony of hundreds of people who've expressed their opposition...it frays the fabric of our civil society and democracy itself." These neighborhoods are home to communities that continue to be subjects of

significant police action and over policing, expanding surveillance compounds disproportionate impact.

2. Surveillance Expansion Has a Disproportionate Impact on the Civil Rights of Communities of Color

Surveillance technologies have a disparate impact on communities of color. In 2024, Seattle's Community Surveillance Working Group warned that the Surveillance Pilot could disproportionately harm communities of color, both through built-in bias in the technology itself and through increasing exposure to law enforcement and the criminal legal system.[5] We have already seen that biased impact in Seattle. Most recently, in Wallingford, where CCTV footage was used to wrongly identify and arrest an Asian man for arson and murder. He was interrogated for hours and jailed for a month; despite having a different name and offering his own in-house technology to prove he was home at the time of the crime.[6] Additionally, during the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, the FBI and SPD surveilled protesters observing First Amendment rights without public knowledge or oversight, at the expense of residents' privacy and civil liberties.[7]

3. Oversight Recommendations Have Not Been Addressed

When the pilot was first proposed, the CPC recognized support for a "time-limited and location-limited pilot" so long as it included "continued community engagement and feedback from the community[,]" "determinations of metrics measurements before implementing any new use of these technologies[,]" and a two year period of time that would include an additional Surveillance Impact Report process to be repeated "before the program is made permanent **or expanded**." The CPC made clear the importance of community engagement and feedback and of the significance of data and oversight that was to be provided by the Office of the Inspector General.[8]

There remain unaddressed and outstanding recommendations regarding surveillance by the CPC, OIG, and the Community Surveillance Working Group intended to address the implications this surveillance has on our constitutional rights and civil liberties.[9] Some of these recommendations have been outstanding since 2019 (regarding the collection and recording First Amendment protests during BLM).[10] OIG's latest surveillance report addresses the need for protection of this data regarding third parties and notes that digital recordings marked for Evidence.com are stored indefinitely.

4. Risk of Misuse of Surveillance Data by the Federal Administration and Outside Actors

We are at an unprecedented time when the Trump Administration is undermining the sovereignty of state and local jurisdictions and targeting sanctuary cities, including Seattle. The Administration has intent to assert control of local law enforcement and local agencies in

sanctuary cities. They first issued executive orders in April, [11] then in June, they deployed the National Guard in L.A.[12] Just this month they announced a takeover of law enforcement in Washington, D.C., through deployment of the National Guard, declaring an emergency to address "out-of-control" violent crime, and deploying federal law enforcement and immigration agents through the City. [13] They have made clear their intentions to do so in other cities, most recently Chicago.[14] They recently sent a letter to Washington State and the City of Seattle demanding an end to "sanctuary jurisdiction" policies that limit police cooperation with ICE.[15] Now is not the time to expand surveillance that could be used by the Administration against our community members.

Equally concerning, yet less understood, are interoperable databases and third-party agreements, which often have the unintended consequence of violating civil rights.[16] Several sources have confirmed that ICE is using ALPR[17] and facial recognition data to track immigrants with local law enforcement agencies, some in sanctuary cities, often obtained informally and in violation of state and privacy laws.[18] Local surveillance information is also vulnerable to misuse through Fusion Centers, [19] and other interoperable databases, where the Administration has access to ALPR and facial recognition, allowing ICE to sidestep sanctuary city laws.[20] The Washington State Fusion Center "facilitate[s] information sharing" between local law enforcement and homeland security partners.[21] It serves as a "virtual network" where state, local, federal, and even private stakeholders share surveillance and law enforcement data. DHS officials work directly alongside SPD, WSP, and King County officers within Washington's Fusion Center. [22] Expanding surveillance in Seattle would only broaden the data available to ICE through this system.

We understand that SPD's immigration policy states: *"Employees will not initiate, maintain, or participate in any police action based on an individual's immigration status."* We trust SPD officers to comply with all applicable laws, but working side by side with federal agents at the Washington Fusion Center puts SPD officers in a difficult position. SPD officers might feel compelled to provide surveillance data, if requested, for any broadly defined "criminal" investigation by the current Administration. And failure to do so could result in increased scrutiny by the Administration.

5. **The Consent Decree Has Terminated, Community Trust and Oversight is Paramount**

We are urging City Council to reject expansion of the Surveillance Pilot at this time. Alternatively, if Council is opposed to rejecting expansion, we strongly recommend engaging community perspectives and convening an Executive Session to examine the potential consequences and legal implications of data collection and sharing under a hostile federal Administration.

The expansion of surveillance that lacks data establishing its efficacy, in the face of community opposition, and when doing so exposes the Seattle community to federal overreach and further misuse of private information will only sow further mistrust of City government and SPD. The City just emerged from federal oversight of SPD, this is the time to listen to and prioritize community voice in public safety and policing – voices asking for investments in housing, behavioral health, and community-based safety programs, not through expansion of untested surveillance prone to misuse and subject to harming communities most impacted by policing.

Sincerely,

Police Practices Workgroup
Community Police Commission

Cc:
All City Councilmembers
Mayor Bruce Harrell
Deputy Mayor Tim Burgess

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[1] This letter issues from the PPWG, a working group of the CPC. The CPC's regularly scheduled September meeting will not take place due to the scheduling conflict with the September 3, 2025, hearing on the Consent Decree at the Western District of Washington.
[2] 2024 CCTV Surveillance Impact Report, SPD: 2024 CCTV SIR FINAL.pdf; 2024 RTCC Surveillance Impact Report, SPD: 2024 RTCC SIR FINAL.pdf
[3] Harrell's Expanded Surveillance Program Clears Hurdle in Seattle Council » The Urbanist
[4] Surveillance Impact Report Privacy and Civil Liberties Impact Assessment, The Community Surveillance Working Group: https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/SAWG/SAWG%20Documents%202024/CSWG%20Privacy%20and%20Civil%20Liberties%20Assessment_%20CCTV%20%26%20RTCC.docx.pdf
[5] Surveillance Impact Report Privacy and Civil Liberties Impact Assessment, The Community Surveillance Working Group: https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/SAWG/SAWG%20Documents%202024/CSWG%20Privacy%20and%20Civil%20Liberties%20Assessment_%20CCTV%20%26%20RTCC.docx.pdf
[6] KUOW - Seattle man says dropped murder, arson charges against him were result of 'racist misidentification'
[7] FBI and SPD infiltrated Seattle 2020 protests, used informants and surveillance | May 28–June 3, 2025 | Real Change
[8] CPC Official Statement on SPD's Technology Assisted Crime Prevention Pilot Program, dated March 21, 2024. https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/CommunityPoliceCommission/Press%20Releases/2024/CPC%20Statement%2003.21.24%20SPD%20technology.pdf
[9] Office of the Inspector General's Consolidated Risk Surveillance Usage Review 2024, dated June 6, 2025 https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/OIG/Audits/OIG_Surveillance_Consolidated2024.pdf
[10] Follow-up Audit of SPD Compliance with Chapter 14.12 of Seattle Municipal Code, Collection of Information for Law Enforcement Purposes: https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/OIG/Audits/2023_Chapter_14.12_Audit.pdf
[11] https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/04/protecting-american-communities-from-criminal-aliens/ https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/05/02/2025-07790/strengthening-and-unleashing-americas-law-enforcement-to-pursue-criminals-and-protect-innocent
[12] Trump deploys California National Guard to LA to quell protests despite the governor's objections | The Seattle Times
[13] Trump's order to deploy troops in DC is his latest use of the National Guard in cities | The Seattle Times

[14] https://www.cnn.com/2025/08/26/politics/trump-national-guard-us-cities
[15] KUOW - As DOJ threatens WA over sanctuary laws, state officials double down on protections
[16] License Plate Readers Proliferate in Washington, Bringing Concerns over ICE Overreach, The Urbanist https://www.theurbanist.org/2025/06/19/license-plate-readers-proliferate-in-washington-ice-overreach/ (Reporting that that data collected by Flock Safety ALPRs, relied upon by the King County Housing Authority (KCHA), was recently shared with ICE and DHS. Authorities in Texas conducted a nationwide search of more than 83,000 ALPR cameras for a woman accessing abortion; the internal audit showed KCHA's data was searched).
[17] Who's Watching Washington: Dangers of Automated License Plate Readers to Immigrant and Reproductive Rights in Washington State, https://jsis.washington.edu/humanrights/2022/12/07/whos-watching-washington/
[18] Immigration Police Can Already Sidestep US Sanctuary City Laws Using Data-Sharing Fusion Centers | WIRED https://www.wired.com/story/ice-sanctuary-cities-fusion-centers/ ; See also, ICE Outlines How Investigators Rely on Third-Party Facial Recognition services https://www.nextgov.com/emerging-tech/2020/06/ice-outlines-how-investigators-rely-third-party-facial-recognition-services/165846/#:~:text=Law%20enforcement%20agencies%20at%20every,methods%2C%E2%80%9D%20the%20document%20states.
[19] See November 19, 2024 Report by STOP Surveillance Technology Oversight Project https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c1bfc7eee175995a4ceb638/t/673b7bdc7bfa22584f88e956/1731951581156/2024.11.19_STOP+Report_Deportation+Data+Centers_final.pdf
https://www.stopspying.org/deportation-data-centers
[20] See November 19, 2024 Report by STOP Surveillance Technology Oversight Project, above: for example, ICE agents in Philadelphia's Fusion Center used the City's automated license plate reader system to track undocumented drivers—despite sanctuary city laws prohibiting such actions. ICE's 2020 facial recognition manual also encouraged reliance on Fusion Center data (though DHS has since deleted the public link: https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/privacy-pia-ice-frs-054-may2020.pdf).
[21] https://www.wsfc.wa.gov/About
[22] https://publicintelligence.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/WSFC1.png