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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY ON 26-H 8077, AN ACT RELATING TO CRIMINAL PROCEDURE – AUTOMATED LICENSE PLATE READERS March 24, 2026

The ACLU of Rhode Island strongly supports this legislation, which would establish long-overdue legislative safeguards for the municipal approval and use of automated license plate readers (ALPRs). Our organization has substantive concerns about the technology of these cameras, but we are just as worried by the possibility that these surveillance systems continue to be implemented in our communities without statutory safeguards and limitations for their use.

ALPRs are often portrayed as law enforcement tools that merely capture photographs of license plates. ALPRs, especially Flock Safety brand cameras which make up the large majority of ALPRs in Rhode Island, can reveal a lot about a person. When compiled, the data generated by these systems can reveal remarkably personal details about individuals' lives. By analyzing this data, users can infer where a person attends religious services, where they work, where they sleep at night, what doctors they see, or where their children attend school, just based on the data generated by the camera.

Rhode Island's use of other ALPR systems – such as those utilized for tolling purposes or to monitor traffic patterns – have generally been contained to capturing only the license plate on a vehicle, and only for a specific, narrow purpose. With Flock Safety ALPRs, investigators may input a wide variety of vehicle characteristics into the system which range far beyond license plates, including searches by vehicle type, make, color, license plate state, and other unique features like roof racks and even *bumper stickers*. These capabilities are extraordinarily invasive, extending far beyond what most people imagine when they hear the term “automated license plate reader.”

Further, as the reference to “searches” suggests, the system does not merely operate passively. Police can input any license plate number – and vehicle characteristics such as those noted above – and obtain information about a vehicle's whereabouts, if captured by a camera, for the preceding 30 days.¹ These searches are not confined solely to a single jurisdiction. Searches can include images from

¹ Generally, Rhode Island jurisdictions that use ALPRs require data to be deleted after 30 days. This timeframe varies from state to state based on statutory limits. For example, Maine retains ALPR data for 21 days and New Hampshire requires the information to be deleted after three minutes. See <https://www.ncsl.org/technology-and-communication/automated-license-plate-readers-state-statutes>.

any municipality participating in the nationwide sharing network, and even camera systems located far outside Rhode Island.²

In fact, recent reports have revealed that Customs and Border Protection has conducted searches of Flock Safety's ALPR databases across the country to enforce the Trump Administration's anti-immigrant agenda.³ At the same time, police departments have reportedly performed Flock Safety lookups on behalf of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which does not have its own access.⁴ Because of this sharing model, any agency with access to Rhode Island's cameras could potentially share that information with other law enforcement agencies around the country. In another disturbing use of the cameras, a police department in Texas used Flock Safety's nationwide network to search more than 83,000 ALPR cameras to locate a woman suspected of having an abortion.⁵ There have also been a number of incidents where police have used Flock Safety to stalk people.⁶

We have deep concerns regarding the widespread proliferation of these unregulated cameras in our communities. It's difficult to get an exact number of cameras in Rhode Island, but by our estimate, there are currently about 240 municipality-owned cameras and 39 Rhode Island State Police-owned cameras located in Rhode Island. That's almost 300 unregulated cameras taking photos of license plates in our communities. Notably, Warren and Portsmouth have recently rejected proposals to install these systems following significant public opposition.

In the absence of legislatively established limits on the use of these systems, the privacy rights of the public remain at the complete discretion of the police department and a private company, which can change their policies at any time. No matter what assurances of privacy are given in policy – by either a police department or Flock Safety – there are no meaningful constraints on their ability to change the rules at any time. Today we may be told, for example, that all photos will be destroyed after 30 days, but nothing prevents the law enforcement agencies or the company six months from now from extending it to 60 days, a year, or even a decade. The same is true for any other “safeguards” offered exclusively by police departmental policy or Flock Safety guidelines.

In short, this bill is a crucial piece of legislation which will ensure that our state maintains oversight over the technology and tools being used by our public-serving institutions. When police surveillance techniques like ALPRs are promoted, they often imply a false choice between public safety and privacy. We know that public safety objectives can be met without sacrificing basic privacy protections or allowing unchecked surveillance. We urge the committee to pass this important legislation.

Thank you for considering our views.

² For example, Woonsocket, RI shares camera data with many municipalities including Houston, TX. *See* <https://transparency.flocksafety.com/woonsocket-ri-pd>

³ <https://www.404media.co/cbp-had-access-to-more-than-80-000-flock-ai-cameras-nationwide/>

⁴ <https://www.404media.co/ice-taps-into-nationwide-ai-enabled-camera-network-data-shows/>

⁵ <https://www.404media.co/a-texas-cop-searched-license-plate-cameras-nationwide-for-a-woman-who-got-an-abortion/>

⁶ See, e.g., <https://wisconsinexaminer.com/2026/03/13/wisconsin-communities-grapple-with-police-misuse-of-flock-surveillance/>