

March 25th, 2023

Washington State Senate Ways & Means Committee

Dear Chair Rolfes, Ranking Member Wilson, and Members of the Committee,

The undersigned organizations write to urge you to oppose Section 130(20) in the proposed 2023-25 biennial budget, which allocates \$3 million for law enforcement use of invasive surveillance technology, such as GPS tracking technology, automated license plate readers, and drones.

Surveillance technology does not guarantee safety. In fact, surveillance creates a safety threat in and of itself. A long history of surveillance establishes a close connection between increasing surveillance infrastructure and exacerbating racial bias in policing. Surveillance tools have always disproportionately harmed the most marginalized communities in our society, whether these tools were designed to do so. From the use of IBM's census-tabulating machine to track and incarcerate Japanese-Americans during World War II, to the use of automated license plate readers to surveil the Muslim community after 9/11, surveillance tools in the hands of police have always powered systemic racism and injustice.

The proposal in the budget has virtually no guardrails for police use of surveillance technology, but history has demonstrated that even when there are guardrails, law enforcement use of these technologies poses serious threats to people's civil rights and civil liberties. For example, drone video tools can be and have been used to track and observe protestors, improperly subjecting political organizers to targeted surveillance and chilling freedoms of speech and association.¹ Police officers have used automated license plate readers to blackmail vehicle owners parked near a gay bar² and search for romantic interests.³

Spending millions of dollars on surveillance technology will significantly increase already excessive police budgets and exacerbate privacy risks to individuals and communities.

We urge you to oppose funding this surveillance technology grant program to protect people's civil rights and civil liberties.

Signed,

Bellingham Tenants Union
Burien People Power
Clark County Justice Group
Coalition for Rights & Safety for People in the Sex Trade
Community to Community
Indivisible Bellingham
Indivisible Eastside
Indivisible Kirkland
Indivisible Plus Washington

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/19/us/politics/george-floyd-protests-surveillance.html>

² <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10000872396390443995604578004723603576296>

³ <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/os-xpm-2013-01-22-os-law-enforcement-access-databases-20130119-story.html>

Indivisible Washington's 8th District
Mi Centro
Indivisible Whidbey
John T Williams Org. Coalition
Liz Darrow for Healthy and Safe Communities
Lower Columbia Indivisible
Odyssey World International Education Services
P4 (Proactive Persistent People for Progress)
People Power WA
Revive Center for Returning Citizens/ I Did The Time
Riveters Collective Justice System Committee
Southwest Washington Equity Coalition
Teens, Training, and Taxes
Unidos of Snohomish County
Urban Indians Northwest
Vancouver for Peace
Vashon Maury Showing Up for Racial Justice Criminal Justice Action Team
WA People's Privacy
Wallingford Indivisible
Washington Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
Washington Coalition for Police Accountability
Washington Defender Association
Washington Low Income Housing Alliance
Washington State Poor People's Campaign
ACLU of Washington