



City of Grass Valley Police Department

"Dedication, Excellence and Partnerships"

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Chief of Police

LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

August 11, 2026

The pace at which technology is advancing is outstripping many of our deeply rooted structures of governance - namely the advancements of artificial intelligence and machine learning. These areas of technology expansion are challenging the co-equal legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. This is true at all levels, from local, to state, to national models. It seems that at every turn there are conversations and concerns being mounted about these issues – from artificial intelligence learning models, to data centers, to data use and privacy, among others – and while government debates at a traditional pace, the systems are evolving rapidly with few checks and balances.

Turning back to late 2021, the City Council approved the use of Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR) technology with a 5-0 vote. I approved of it as well because I believed in the ability to use technology and its efficiencies to protect our town from the impacts of expanding organized retail theft and the ability to solve violent crime. The program was brought forward under SB34 guidelines as well as the police department policies. To date, the technology has helped to solve countless cases, including over 100 stolen vehicle recoveries and arrests, hit and run suspect identifications, robbery suspect arrests, locating missing and at-risk individuals, and many other crimes that may have gone unsolved without the system.

However, during the nearly 5 years since its adoption, and subsequent expansion, much has changed. The system, originally only a license plate reading system, has evolved to include much more powerful computer-intelligence tools, and the expansion of networks across jurisdictions has also enhanced the reach of the data collection and databases. With these enhancements come concerns. None of these questions can be taken in a vacuum, and I am sure when this issue is addressed more directly by the United States Supreme Court the justices too will not look at the issue in isolation. To date, however, the high court has not taken up this topic directly.

Rather, the courts have (as was recently cited in a privacy case dealing with cell phone subscriber data taken under search warrant without particularity for a person for which the police were searching) cited other cases that leave “a trail of breadcrumbs—sprinkling hints—for how lower courts should proceed on these novel Fourth Amendment issues.” The breadcrumbs of cases mentioned above are not directly related to ALPR issues; however, ALPR issues can certainly be defined as “Fourth Amendment issues.” Issues such as – the warrantless collection and access of the information; the methods of collection; the controls, security, privacy, and storage duration of data; the use of data for product development; and the sharing of the data for governmental (and non-governmental) purposes – are areas of concern.

Grass Valley Police Department policy has addressed many of these issues, yet we do not control outside providers and/or their system designs and product development. In recent audit reviews, we did find that there were 160 queries on our network from out-of-state or federal/tribal agencies – a very small subset of overall activity. This audit revealed that we were in compliance with relevant state laws and guidance, namely SB54 and Attorney General Information Bulletin 2023-DLE-06, at the time of their respective issuance. The stated reasons for each search by the 160 out of state entities do not indicate use for non-criminal matters barred by SB54. As an in-state-sharing partner, on the larger ALPR network, the audit did reveal that at its highest, around March of this year, hundreds of thousands of California agency queries were being performed against our data (and other data on the network) each month. A large majority of those queries were from agencies in southern California. In contrast, local law enforcement agency queries were closer to 1,000 per month. One criminal investigation could account for dozens of searches as investigators hone their search. To the extent in-state sharing had any purpose other than SB54 compliant use, each California agency would be responsible for the data's lawful use.

Still, there remained more questions than answers with use of the Flock ALPR system and the changing landscape. The most compelling item of evidence, in addition to widespread community concern, is the unsettled legislative actions yet to catch up with this technology. While law-making is still active, judicial review is likely much further behind. Over time statehouses will fine tune laws to correspond with technological advances, the executive branches will make their best assessment at any given point of time as to the technology's use, and later, courts will rule as to where those two branches align or deviate. Clear guidance will inform local policy.

More than one thing can be true at the same time, while time and information can change the calculus. In the case of ALPR technology used by the Grass Valley Police Department, the initial use and deployment had been well reasoned, understood at the time, and believed to be for the benefit of the community. This was all true. However, things have changed since that time – rapidly. Changes outside of our control have warranted a new look and assessment; questions that we have taken the past 60 days to evaluate, and answer questions that are relevant today but were different before.

Based upon our comprehensive review, a further analysis of the technological changes and unsettled future, conversations with community members, and assessment of evolving use of ALPR technology across all branches of government, the Grass Valley Police Department has decided to indefinitely suspend our use of fixed-point ALPR readers within our City limits, exercising our ability to cancel our contract with Flock Safety. As a department will continue to monitor developments relative to ALPR and other technologies, ensuring quality crime prevention and detection tools (both emergent and traditional) are available when appropriate to ensure our dedicated policing professionals have the tools to do their difficult and noble work each day – particularly in this rapidly evolving world of technology.

Sincerely,



Alexander K. Gammelgard