

FACE SURVEILLANCE BAN

Protecting racial justice, immigrant communities, privacy, and free speech

BACKGROUND

Private companies large and small are pushing unreliable, untested face surveillance systems on local governments across the country. This is happening despite the fact that there are no laws in place to regulate face surveillance technology to protect civil rights or civil liberties. Some city governments, like Chicago and Detroit, are even using face surveillance on their city camera networks, enabling a kind of mass surveillance that endangers basic liberties in a free society.

Government use of face surveillance poses unprecedented risks to our civil rights and civil liberties, particularly to vulnerable communities like immigrants and people of color.

THE BASICS

Face surveillance systems are computer programs designed to analyze images of human faces to identify and track people at a distance, without their knowledge or consent.

These systems can be used to help agencies like Immigration and Customs Enforcement locate and arrest immigrants, and can lead to investigations of people who are not breaking the law, but happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

THE BAN

The face surveillance ban would prohibit municipal agencies and employees from installing face surveillance technology on public surveillance camera networks, ensuring that people are not subject to unregulated, mass surveillance in public space.

This technology is dangerous when it works, and when it doesn't.

People have a right to take their kids to school, visit the doctor, see a substance-use counselor, practice their religion, and protest the government without being constantly tracked and monitored by government agencies.

The proposed ban protects our freedom of speech and our privacy. It also promotes racial justice and safeguards immigrants' rights today and for future generations.



WHY WE NEED A BAN ON FACE SURVEILLANCE

THE RESEARCH

Face and biometric surveillance is **flawed** and reinforces **racial and gender bias**.

- A study by Joy Buolamwini, a researcher at MIT, found that Black women were **35%** more likely than white men to be misclassified by face surveillance technology.
- An expert review of over **1,000 studies** found that “emotion recognition” software is fundamentally flawed.
- A live trial of face surveillance technology in the UK misidentified **4 out of 5** people, according to an independent study.

THE REALITY

This technology is deployed and aggressively marketed right here, right now — **without any regulations**.

In emails uncovered by the ACLU of Massachusetts, the CEO of a face surveillance start-up admits to **Plymouth** municipal authorities that his technology might work only **30% of the time**.¹ Nonetheless, he pushes aggressively for its adoption in schools, government buildings, and public streets — all in secret, with no public debate or buy-in from elected officials.

THE POLLING

According to an ACLU of Massachusetts poll, voters **overwhelmingly support a moratorium**.

79% Seventy-nine percent of Massachusetts voters support a statewide moratorium on government use of face surveillance technology.

That includes 84% of Democrats, 82% of Independents, and 50% of Republicans.

91% Ninety-one percent of voters think the Commonwealth needs to regulate the government’s ongoing use of face surveillance technology.

76% Seventy-six percent of voters do not think the government should be able to monitor and track people with this technology.

THE MOVEMENT

In tech hubs nationwide — from **San Francisco** and **Oakland**, to **Somerville** and **Cambridge** — cities are taking action to limit government use of face surveillance technology.

Take action today. Join the movement to protect our rights in the digital age.

Learn more and get involved at aclum.org/presspause.

¹ <https://data.aclum.org/public-records/plymouth-police-department-face-surveillance-emails/>