

Flock surveillance camera use explodes across the United States

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Junction City, Oregon is considering joining the rapidly expanding list of communities deploying Flock automated license plate reader (ALPR) cameras. Amid strong public opposition and budget concerns, city leaders postponed a decision on a proposed 90-day trial until spring 2027.

During a public meeting on the matter, community members spoke strongly against the use of the invasive cameras, which are commonly used by the police and immigration Gestapo to stalk workers.

“They collect information on everyone first and ask questions later. That changes the relationship between citizens and their government. Instead of conducting targeted investigations based on evidence, it creates a searchable record of the moments of movements of ordinary people, a record that is vulnerable to misuse,” said local resident Rachael Steen-Larsen in a report by Oregon Public Broadcasting.

Similar opposition has emerged in Springfield, Ohio, where the Trump administration’s attacks on Haitian immigrants have sharpened concerns about the city’s 38 Flock cameras.

“With so many TPS holders suddenly without legal status after the Supreme Court decision, we’re at a high risk for ICE to use Flock cameras to target immigrants in our community,” resident Jill Potter-Bonsell told the city commission, referring to Temporary Protected Status.

The *Springfield News-Sun* reported that the police division shares access to its camera network with 2,500 agencies. Of these, 130 have agreements with ICE under the federal 287(g) program, which authorizes local police to carry out certain immigration enforcement functions.

Police Captain Jeff Williams told the newspaper that the department filters out immigration-related searches and would cut off agencies found to be deceptive. But these assurances depend on the agencies conducting searches truthfully reporting their purpose.

As resident Amanda Richardson warned, “if they just categorize it as something other than immigration, there’s not necessarily something in place to stop that.”

The police division nevertheless denied the *News-Sun*’s request for audit logs showing which outside agencies had searched its database and their stated reasons, citing a state-

law exemption from public disclosure.

Federal immigration police have already forced many Haitian residents in Springfield to wear GPS ankle monitors. Among them was Pierre Damas Bel, a 20-year-old Wright State University student who died on August 31 in what his family described as a suicide, weeks after being fitted with a monitor.

In Oregon, opposition has already forced several jurisdictions to abandon Flock. Just south of Junction City, the city of Eugene removed the 57 cameras it had deployed after strong pushback from the community led to the cancellation of the city’s contract with Flock.

Lane County canceled its contract with Flock in December 2025. Bend turned off its cameras in January 2026 and decided against renewing its contract. Woodburn disabled its cameras in November 2025 and permanently ended its contract in June 2026. In Springfield, strong community opposition followed the installation of 25 Flock cameras beginning in September 2025. The city canceled its contract in December, and physical removal began in January 2026.

In Florence, the city council voted 3-2 to keep the contract and six cameras up, despite outcry from residents. Councilor Mike Webb, who voted to keep the cameras in operation, stated at the meeting, “I think this has become way too political.” This statement reveals more than the councilor likely intended.

Flock’s ALPR network has come under increasing scrutiny as misuse and invasions of privacy have come to light. The cameras aren’t simply taking snapshots of plates and tracking criminals but are constantly recording photos and videos that are fed into Flock’s database. These photos are then turned over to local law enforcement and federal agents, including Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), circumventing the Fourth Amendment’s protections against unreasonable searches.

The expansion of this mass surveillance is staggering. Since its founding in 2017, Flock’s growth has ballooned from small neighborhoods and HOAs to being in 700 cities by the end of 2020. This began to accelerate during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, to over 1,200 cities in mid-2021, and 1,500 by early 2022. This grew to 40,000 cameras in 4,000 cities by the end of 2023 into 2024.

Flock reports more than 120,000 cameras across 49 states,

recording approximately 20 billion license plate scans per month. That amounts to an average of roughly 667 million scans per day, or 7,700 per second, feeding a vast searchable database of vehicle movements to police and federal agents.

According to Flock, its platform has approximately 140,000 monthly active users. In February 2024, the company claimed its technology helped solve more than 700,000 crimes annually, roughly 10 percent of all reported crime nationwide. This was an extrapolated estimate, not a verified tally of solved cases. Behind these promotional claims lies a documented record of errors and police abuse of the technology to stalk, harass and victimize workers and their families.

An August 2 piece published by the *Washington Post* detailed the stalking and abuse of Marci Bakely, a single mother from Georgia, and her daughter. Her ex-boyfriend, former Braselton police chief Michael Steffman, used his access to the Flock system as a member of law enforcement to track her movements. This unfettered digital crowbar into Bakely's life allowed Steffman to menace her as she went to doctors' appointments, personal outings and even grocery shopping. His stalking extended to Bakely's teenage daughter. He searched their license plates roughly 600 times in total.

Another harrowing instance involving license plate reader technology occurred in August 2020 in Aurora, Colorado. Police confronted Brittney Gilliam and four children at gunpoint in a parking lot after mistakenly identifying their SUV as stolen. Video shows her 12-year-old sister, 14- and 17-year-old nieces and six-year-old daughter lying facedown on the pavement, crying as police surrounded them. Officers handcuffed Gilliam, her sister and her 17-year-old niece. The SUV's Colorado license plate bore the same number as that of a stolen motorcycle registered in Montana.

Similarly, ICE and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) have obtained access to Flock data, including through local police conducting searches on their behalf or sharing login credentials. Officers can search vehicle sightings by license plate or vehicle characteristics, while entering a stated justification in a separate "reason" field. Audit logs have revealed searches citing immigration enforcement and ICE. These entries expose how a network promoted as a tool for local criminal investigations has been enlisted in the mass deportation operation.

The infrastructure to support this police-state dragnet is far from limited to Flock. Axon produces Fusus CORE, a plug-and-play device that connects existing cameras to its cloud-based Fusus platform, allowing police to access their feeds. Police use such platforms in "real-time crime centers" that integrate cameras with other surveillance technology.

These systems can combine private camera feeds, automated license plate readers, gunshot detectors and drones. Flock offers a comparable platform, FlockOS, as well as the investigative data platform Flock Nova. Nova connects records management systems, computer-aided dispatch, jail records, license plate

reader data, open-source intelligence, public records and other connected datasets in a searchable interface.

These "pre-crime" tools are used to generate lists of targets it deems *likely* to commit some form of crime, so that law enforcement and government agencies can act before any crime is committed. The fictional horror of the oppressive panopticon of the state has become a present reality.

At the same time, the deployment of Flock cameras has seen notable push-back. In Ord, Nebraska the city council voted unanimously to remove two Flock cameras, becoming the first city in Nebraska to outright reject the technology, after community members pushed for removal following installation in late 2025. In El Cerrito, California, after public outcry, the city council voted in May 2026 not to renew its Flock contract, switching cameras off on June 6, 2026.

In Menominee, Michigan, city leaders voted unanimously in May 2026 to cancel an existing Flock arrangement after residents raised that the camera was reportedly activated without city council approval, with officials questioning where collected information was going and how the system had been turned on before formal authorization.

The anti-surveillance project DeFlock lists more than 150 cases of opposition to automated license plate reader networks, including contract cancellations, rejected contracts and camera deactivations. More than 100 entries are dated in 2026, underscoring the breadth of the growing backlash.

Appeals to city councils and campaigns for legislative measures do not address the capitalist roots of this surveillance apparatus or the class interests it serves. Nor can individual acts of vandalism against cameras halt the growth of the police state. Such actions provide the authorities with a pretext to criminalize and repress all those who oppose the use of these invasive technologies by the police and the financial oligarchy.

The root cause is capitalism, overseen by both the Republicans and Democrats, and the drive by the ruling elite to accelerate the exploitation of the working class at the expense of democratic rights, workplace safety and workers' lives. To enforce their dictates, Flock and other spy cameras are deployed against workers to propagate the mass social inequality that is the defining feature of social life.

To dismantle the police-state mass surveillance, end attacks on jobs, benefits and healthcare, to end war and avoid nuclear conflagration, to harness the power of technology—especially AI—to advance science and halt climate disaster, the working class must dismantle capitalism and establish workers power.



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