



NASHVILLE DEFENDERS

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April 20, 2021

Members of the Metropolitan Council
Metro Historic Courthouse
One Public Square, Suite 204
PO Box 196300
Nashville, TN 37219-630

To Vice Mayor Shulman and Members of the Metro Council:

I understand that BL 2020-582 and amendments will come before your body this evening. I have had the opportunity to provide insights about the license plate readers (LPRs) through the public safety committee on two occasions. As the Chief Public Defender, I feel compelled to share my thoughts on issues involving public safety, and I appreciate the willingness of the Council to provide a platform that will allow me to engage and hear my concerns.

As I shared in my remarks at the January 7, 2021 special committee meeting, I believe that the risks outweigh the benefits to the proposed expansion of the use of LPRs. In a time where a diverse coalition of members of the Nashville community have pushed to reform the unnecessary harms related to policing experienced by certain communities and people in this city, I am concerned that by expanding the use of LPRs the city is responding to those concerns by increasing surveillance in Nashville. Additionally, we have seen across the country that increased use of technology in policing does not actually reduce the harm experienced by Black and Brown communities nor does it make communities safer. Many Nashville residents have asked to have more resources allocated to education, affordable housing, and building community initiatives that will increase public safety in neighborhoods. While I understand that there is no fiscal note attached to the bill in its present state, the expansion of LPRs will have future costs associated that could be directly spent in our communities, particularly those impacted by poverty.

As I have acknowledged before, LPRs have a legitimate purpose in certain scenarios, particularly as it relates to AMBER Alerts and other efforts to locate missing persons. However, without safeguards in place, the technology can result in harm to all residents. We have discussed at length the substantial privacy concerns related to LPRs when there is no policy that regulates their use and information retention. We cannot undo the extreme harm, like those experienced by children held at gunpoint in Colorado, that would be caused by misreads from LPR hits. Therefore, though I am opposed to the expansion of LPRs in Nashville, if your body determines that this effort is necessary I urge you to adopt the bill with the most limitations on usage, the shortest retention policy and affords the community the security that oversight will be a priority.



Martasha L. Johnson, Public Defender



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Thank you for your time and consideration of my point of view.

Sincerely,

Martesha L. Johnson
Chief Public Defender
Nashville Defender's Office



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