The Body Camera Accountability Act (AB 1215 - Ting)
Preventing the Misuse of Body Cameras to Harm Public Safety

The people of California were promised that body cameras would guard against police misconduct and increase community trust in law enforcement. Implanting body cameras with face recognition technology would be a dangerous move in the wrong direction, unacceptably transforming these devices into police surveillance networks with potentially tragic consequences.

People should be able to go about their business without being face-scanned and logged into a government tracking database. This bill would prevent the use of face surveillance and other biometric surveillance technology with police body cameras and similar devices, joining other states that have already taken this technology off the table for those devices.

Face-scanning body cameras permit pervasive and ongoing surveillance. Modern facial recognition systems automatically identify and track you from afar without your knowledge or consent. Today thousands of California law enforcement officers carry body worn cameras. The addition of face recognition would transform body cameras into roving surveillance networks; registering and reporting who we are, where we go, and where we have been over time – from the homes of friends, to medical offices, places of worship, and public protests.

Body cameras should be for officer accountability and transparency, not surveillance of communities. Chances are, you or someone you love is already in a government face recognition database. Biometric surveillance doesn't just identify people with criminal records – about half of American adults are in a facial recognition database. All Californians should be worried about face recognition on body cameras – but the risks of this technology are particularly acute in communities where police misconduct regularly threatens the safety of Black people, Latinos, and immigrants.

Facial recognition technology is often inaccurate – especially for women and people of color. Multiple studies have demonstrated these inaccuracies. In the hands of police, false matches could lead to false accusations, unjust arrests, tragic use of force, and even death. In a test conducted last year, Amazon's "Rekognition" system misidentified 28 sitting members of Congress as random people from a mug shot database, with people of color disproportionately misidentified. In fact, the CEO of prominent body camera manufacturer Axon has raised concerns about the use of facial recognition with body cameras.

Face-scanning body cameras will create databases that put us all at risk. Face surveillance-enabled body cameras would require the creation of vast public and privately-held databases that could be exploited and hacked. We've already seen private companies try to create computer-generated "threat assessments" based on people's financial records, credit scores, and social media accounts. When we start labeling people as threats and stop seeing them as people, we increase the potential for tragic interactions between police and the public. No one should be labeled a threat just because an algorithm-powered police camera paired their face to a secretive database.

Federal authorities could exploit body camera databases to target innocent Californians. We already know that Immigrations and Customs Enforcement has paid for access to a corporate database filled with location information about California drivers, in effect circumventing state law that prevents local police entanglement with ICE. If federal authorities gained access to a body camera face recognition database, they could massively expand their power to target and track immigrants, activists, religious minorities, and people of color.

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