



May 11, 2026

The Honorable [REDACTED]
Cook County Commissioner [REDACTED]
118 N. Clark St., Room [REDACTED]
Chicago, IL 60602
Sent via email to [REDACTED]

Re: Funding Briefcam in Cook County Jail

Dear Commissioner Britton,

The Illinois Network for Pretrial Justice writes to you along with 80 community, faith, and policy organizations to express our concerns regarding the Cook County Sheriff's Office's request for the County to fund Briefcam AI surveillance technology to be used in Cook County Jail. We are calling on you to holistically review the human rights crisis at Cook County Jail before making decisions about this contract that claims to be about improving the safety and well-being of people placed in the jail's custody.

Over the last several years, we have seen an increase in the number of people who have lost their lives while incarcerated in Cook County Jail. In 2022, the jail experienced its [highest mortality rate on record](#), with more people dying while in the Sheriff's custody than during the COVID-19 pandemic. These deaths have been the result of people not receiving timely medical care while overdosing, guards not being present during physical altercations due to cross watching, and violence from sheriff's deputies and other incarcerated people.

It is clear that there are real health and safety issues behind the walls of Cook County Jail, but in order to address them, we must review the conditions of the jail, the procedures in place to respond to incidents of violence, and actions of law enforcement officials inside the jail. Such a holistic, transparent review is urgent in light of the facts that a Cook County Sheriff's Officer has been [charged with bringing lethal drugs into the jail](#) and others are currently being [investigated for homicide for the death of Martinez Duncan](#).

Briefcam is video surveillance software powered by artificial intelligence. The technology uses facial recognition to purportedly identify people observed, document their activity, and flag

suspected criminal activity. But due to privacy concerns and false positives which led to civil rights abuses, Briefcam has been [banned by the French Supreme Court](#). In the United States, 15 states already have laws regulating the use of facial recognition technology; two, Montana and Utah, require a judicial warrant to deploy facial recognition video surveillance. The Illinois General Assembly is currently considering HB5521, which would ban the use of facial recognition for law enforcement and consequently make the use of Briefcam and similar technologies in the jail illegal.

The use of this technology within a controlled setting like the jail creates the potential for civil rights and privacy violations and endangers the health and safety of incarcerated people. Briefcam has the potential to [misidentify criminal activity](#), which could lead to Sheriff's deputies being deployed to a part of the jail where there is no safety concern. This has the potential to unnecessarily pull officers from monitoring other sections of the jail and could lead to unwarranted interactions between deputies and incarcerated people. In some instances, like in the death of Martinez Duncan, those interactions can lead to the loss of life or physical harm to incarcerated people or Sheriff's staff themselves. Because of this dynamic, it is incredibly important that Sheriffs are only dispatched when a verified safety concern is present.

Facial recognition technology also has the potential to [falsely identify people being surveilled](#). The risk of misidentification is even higher when surveilling Black people. Studies have shown that [facial recognition technology misidentifies Black faces at higher rates than other demographics](#), increasing the likelihood of racial profiling and false accusations. This is of particular concern since 69% of people in Cook County Jail are Black.

The use of facial recognition also raises important privacy concerns. Despite its inaccuracies, facial recognition relies on verifying identity by matching sensitive biometric information with an existing database. While the State has important safeguards regulating companies' use of this data, those same companies are exempted from those safeguards when they contract with state and city agencies. In this case, it appears that Briefcam, on behalf of the Cook County Jail, is tasked with creating a centralized database of inmate's biometric information, and it is not clear how data collected through Briefcam may be used over time including who will have access, who it may be disclosed with, or how long that data is retained, and internal policies governing use may evolve over time without transparency or accountability. Significant caution and investigation is critical when considering the introduction of this technology into a facility

where there are existing safety concerns due to the policies, actions or inactions of the Cook County Sheriff and his deputies.

Moreover, there is a real risk that the technology might lead to violation of State laws, such as the one that [mandates that people in custody be under human observation every thirty minutes](#). A recent audit revealed that Cook County was not in compliance [with cell check standards nearly 20% of the time and regularly engaged in cross-watching](#), making it more difficult to observe incarcerated people. The Justice Department found that cross-watching, the practice of having a single officer supervise two tiers on the same shift, was responsible for “[multiple preventable deaths](#)” in the Cook County Jail. A recent audit confirmed that Cook County Sheriff’s Officers often [engaged in cross-watching](#), making it more difficult to observe incarcerated people. Attempting to utilize Briefcam as a substitute for human oversight has the potential to cause further harm within the jail. Instead of utilizing technology to dangerously replace human oversight, the Sheriff should reassign officers currently [duplicating efforts of other law enforcement agencies](#) to serve his office's core function: overseeing the jail.

In addition to the civil rights issues presented by this software, there are also fiscal concerns. As this technology develops further, there are likely to be increased costs over time. These could range from software updates to the need to purchase new cameras or other hardware. In 2022, the Sheriff’s Office pitched the County Board on spending \$11.4 million for a helicopter to help “[combat the violent crime plaguing our community, assist in large-scale emergency situations, and help locate missing people](#).” While the Sheriff assured Commissioners that this expenditure would cover the full cost of the helicopter, a year later he came back to the Board requesting several million more dollars to operate it. Since going operational, the helicopter has [mainly been used to cite people for traffic violations](#). This recent example shows the importance of making sure we understand the full costs of proposals coming from the Sheriff’s Office and the need to have a clear plan on how the appropriation is intended to be used. This technology could also lead to [lawsuits for civil rights violations](#) occurring in the wake of false alerts from Briefcam, leading to even more strain on the county budget.

We would be remiss not to acknowledge the difficult budget planning process the County Board is about to engage in. Like jurisdictions across the country, the Cook County Board will have to make difficult decisions about how to balance their budget in the wake of federal funding cuts, including how the County can fill gaps in the social safety net created by the Trump administration. Money that goes toward purchasing this dubious surveillance technology is

money that could instead go toward filling the dire gaps left in essential human services that also contribute to safer communities.

We again call on you and your fellow commissioners to reject the proposed purchase of Briefcam. Instead, we ask the Board to follow up on the 2024 hearing on deaths in Cook County Jail and review the Sheriff's management of the Jail to explore effective, evidence-based mechanisms to protect the health and safety of people in the Sheriff's custody that neither risk civil rights and privacy violations nor unnecessarily waste taxpayer dollars on software that may present new safety risks and expose those detained in the jail to great harm.

Sincerely,

The Illinois Network for Pretrial Justice

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The Illinois Network for Pretrial Justice & Our Partners:

10 Minutes A Day	Chicago Torture Justice Center
33rd Ward Working Families	Chicago United Families' Coalition
A Just Harvest	Chicago United Solidarity Project (CUSP)
A New PATH (Parents for Addiction Treatment & Healing)	Chicago Votes
Access Living	Clergy for a New Drug Policy
ACLU of Illinois	Community Renewal Society
AFSC Chicago Peacebuilding	Equality Illinois
AIDS Foundation Chicago	Faith Coalition for the Common Good
Ascend Justice	Faith In Action
Asian Americans Advancing Justice: Chicago	Farmworker and Landscaper Advocacy Project-FLAP
Believers Bail Out	First Defense Legal Aid
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action Champaign-Urbana	First Followers
Better Government Association	Fox Valley Citizens for Peace & Justice
Black Justice Project	Illinois Alliance for Reentry and Justice
BYP100	Illinois Black Advocacy Initiative
Cabrini Green Legal Aid	IL-NOW (National Organization for Women)
Cannabis Equity IL Coalition	Indivisible Chicago Alliance
Change Peoria	Indivisible Lakeview / Lincoln Park / Old Town
Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation	Illinois Prison Project
Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts	Justice and Witness Ministry of Chicago
Chicago for Abortion Rights	Metropolitan Association – Illinois
Chicago Democratic Socialists of America	Conference United Church of Christ
Chicago Jobs with Justice	Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Family Services
Chicago Metropolitan Association, Illinois	

Liberation Library
Lincoln Park Presbyterian Church Chicago
Lucy Parsons Labs
Mamas Activating Movements for Abolition &
Solidarity (MAMAS)
Mano a Mano Family Resource Center
National Lawyers Guild Chicago
Nehemiah Trinity Rising
Nikkei Uprising
Quad Cities Democratic Socialists of America
Parole Illinois
Pretrial Justice Institute
Prison Policy Initiative
RaisetheVoices.org
Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism
(RAC-IL)
Restore Justice
Rockford Urban Ministries
She Votes Illinois
SisterReach Illinois
Stick Talk

Students for Sensible Drug Policy – IL
Southsiders Organized for Unity and Liberation
The LIAM Foundation
The People’s Lobby
The Porchlight Collective SAP
The Uplift
Trinity United Church of Christ Chicago
Unitarian Universalist Advocacy Network of
Illinois
Unitarian Universalist Prison Ministry of Illinois
United Congregations of MetroEast
University of Chicago Harm Reduction Project
West Suburbs Illinois Democratic Socialists of
America
West Town Law Office
Women's Justice Institute
Workers Center for Racial Justice
YWCA McLean County