May 28, 2020

To: Boston City Council

**Testimony in Support of
Ordinance Banning Facial Recognition Technology in Boston**

Dear City Councilors,

Library Freedom Project fully supports the ordinance banning facial recognition technology in Boston presented by Councilors Wu and Arroyo. This ordinance establishes a ban on government use of face surveillance in the City of Boston. Boston must pass this ordinance to join Springfield, Somerville, Cambridge, Brookline, and Northampton in protecting racial justice, privacy, and freedom of speech.

Library Freedom Project is a library advocacy group that trains library workers to advocate for and educate their library community about privacy and surveillance. Established in 2015, its past and present cohort members number 65+ library workers from across the US, Canada and Mexico, including 8 librarians from Massachusetts, in a mix of public and academic libraries in rural, suburban and urban communities. These library workers educate their colleagues and library users about surveillance by creating library programs, union initiatives, workshops and other resources to inform and to agitate for change. Library workers understand that knowledge is power; our sword is advocacy and organizing.

Facial recognition represents a class of technology that is antithetical to the values of privacy and confidentiality of library workers. As library staff, we understand that part of our work is to represent these values in the services and resources we provide to our library community in order to reduce the harm of state and corporate scrutiny. As we understand this, we can see the social and economic imperatives that privilege some and marginalize others that are encoded into computer systems and applications. This is as a result of the structure of our technology industry which prioritizes the class interests of management, venture capitalists and stockholders, mostly white men.

The racial and gender biases inherent in face surveillance technology are indicative of those values and describe how moneyed interests seek to shape or reinforce racist and gendered oppressions by creating computer systems that extend the reach of profiling through the exercise of capital. Democratic, direct worker and community control over the development, acquisition, and practices of surveillance and surveillance technology is an urgent priority to protect safety and privacy in our neighborhoods and schools.

The Ordinance Banning Facial Recognition in Boston would end the use of this surveillance technology in the City of Boston. It has been reported that the City's contract with Briefcam, a vendor that provides video analytics for city agencies, expired on May 14th, 2020. Should the contract be renewed, the City is one update away from the latest version of the platform which will provide the capability for facial recognition to the city agencies that use it. Library Freedom Project supports this urgently necessary ordinance to ban facial recognition technology in Boston for the safety and privacy of those who live and work in the City.

Library Freedom Project urges the Council to wrest control over surveillance from other entities in the City of Boston by supporting and passing this crucial ban. We can no longer allow Boston to adopt authoritarian, unregulated, biased surveillance technology.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Library Freedom Project