

Boston Public Library Professional Staff Association
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Boston City Council

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

Dear City Councilors,

The Boston Public Library Professional Staff Association MSLA Local 4928 AFT supports the ordinance banning facial recognition technology in Boston as 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.

In voting to do so, our Union recognizes that facial recognition and other forms of biometric surveillance are a real threat to the civil liberties and safety of our colleagues and of library users. Library workers and library users spend part of each day in these public spaces in full view of existing municipal surveillance cameras. Neither working conditions nor use of a public library should entail the potential for unregulated scrutiny by law enforcement. Our library ethics of privacy and intellectual freedom are incompatible with this invasive technology.

BPL PSA recognizes that facial recognition and other biometric surveillance technologies are proven to be riddled with racist, ableist and gendered algorithmic biases. These systems routinely misidentify people of color which can result in needless contact with law enforcement and other scrutiny, essentially automating racial profiling.

Our Union recognizes the harm of surveillance for the youth in our city, especially immigrant, Black, Asian and Latino youth. Unregulated scrutiny by authorities leads to early contact with law enforcement, resulting in disenfranchisement and unrealized futures.

Our Union also recognizes that these systems are acquired and implemented without community assent and controlled in obscurity by authorities who can then use them to capture our images and identify us outside of established legal procedures. This is no different than being stopped and asked for identification or to stand in a perpetual police lineup without proper cause. The acquisition of surveillance technology and police practices in regards to its use must be brought under the democratic control of our elected City council.

Our Union recognizes that public areas such as libraries, parks and sidewalks exist as spaces in which residents and visitors to our City should be free to move, speak, think, inquire, perform, protest and assemble freely without the intense scrutiny of surveillance by law enforcement.

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Public areas exist to extend our rights and provide space for the performance of our civil liberties, not policing.

A ban on face surveillance technology is critically important for residents and visitors to the City of Boston, for right now and for the future. Biometric surveillance technology is evolving rapidly. It is becoming cheaper to purchase and easier to scale and use alongside extensive government, police and corporate datasets that can enable real time profiling of individuals. BPLPSA encourages you to ban the use of face surveillance by government agencies in the City of Boston by supporting and passing this crucial ordinance. We cannot allow Boston to adopt authoritarian, unregulated, biased surveillance technology.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Boston Public Library Professional Staff Association, MSLA Local 4928 - AFT