

SOS (Safety Over Surveillance) Palo Alto: Coalition of Groups Calls for Cancellation of Flock Contract and for Covering of Flock Surveillance Cameras in Palo Alto

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A coalition of 11 community organizations, under the name SOS (Safety Over Surveillance) Palo Alto, has formed in response to revelations of extensive data leaks from the Flock camera system in use by the City of Palo Alto. Calling the surveillance equipment a threat to the safety of Palo Alto residents, SOS Palo Alto urges Palo Alto leaders to end the City's relationship with Flock Group, Inc., and to cease mass surveillance in Palo Alto. The coalition is reacting to data leaks reported recently by Palo Alto Weekly ([Palo Alto license plate data searched by hundreds of out-of-state agencies](#)) and the Daily Post ([Palo Alto learns its license plate cameras could be searched by other police agencies across the country](#)).

While the Palo Alto Police Department has told residents that outside agencies have never accessed its Flock camera system, the Department's recent release of network audit logs shows a multi-year pattern of outside agencies improperly accessing the Department's system in violation of California law (SB 34) and the City's own [Surveillance Use Policy](#).

Despite guardrails that the Palo Alto City Council has established, audit logs show that outside organizations were able to easily access Palo Alto's Flock database without required prior authorization. According to data scientist Austin Marshall: "The Flock data leaks that were exposed in Palo Alto were not a one-time fluke, but reflect a pattern of repeated negligence. We saw it in Santa Clara County, in Los Altos, Menlo Park, Mountain View, and now right here in Palo Alto."

Particularly alarming is the fact that outside agencies were able to access the Flock system of Palo Alto hundreds of times by directly accessing Palo Alto's Flock database without complying with the City's written policies. While Flock has claimed that past violations have been corrected, experts note that Palo Alto data remains vulnerable to back door or side door access.¹

¹ "Side door" refers to access resulting from authorized agencies sharing Palo Alto's data with unauthorized agencies without Palo Alto's knowledge.

"Back door" refers to access to Palo Alto data through Flock by a third party without the knowledge or approval of any City representative.

For an external law enforcement agency to access Flock system data held by the Palo Alto Police Department, the City's Surveillance Use Policy requires a written request submitted by the agency; a legitimate law enforcement or public safety purpose; the Police Chief's review and approval; and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the external agency. In addition, requests for Flock data by non-law-enforcement or non-prosecutorial agencies must be processed and fulfilled only as required by law. Based on the extent of Palo Alto data that was improperly accessed by outside agencies over an extended period, it appears that either Palo Alto data from the Flock system was shared with unauthorized parties without the City Council's or the Police Department's knowledge, or the Department ignored the policy safeguards that the Palo Alto City Council had specifically put in place for the Flock system.

Throughout the country, experts have warned that the Flock system can easily be hacked. Flock has shown not only that its system is hackable, but that it is willing to allow outside agencies into other cities' databases without proper authorization. Flock data has been accessed for ICE investigations and for actions against women seeking abortions. Indivisible Palo Alto Plus leader Melissa Dinwiddie warns: "Despite legal and contractual restrictions against the monitoring of residents exercising their First Amendment rights, we already have abundant evidence that Flock cameras have been used elsewhere for this purpose." In Palo Alto, multiple Flock cameras are situated in locations frequented by political protesters.

SOS Palo Alto has issued the following demands:

1. In light of the breaches of Palo Alto data, we call upon the City to cancel its contract with Flock.
2. Until the Flock contract is canceled and Flock cameras are disabled, we call upon the City to cover all Flock cameras.

SOS Palo Alto members

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)

Blue Turn Indivisible

Envision Transform Build East Palo Alto (ETB)

Indivisible Mid-Peninsula

Indivisible Palo Alto Plus

Los Altos for Representation and Equity (LARE)

Multi-Faith Voices for Peace and Justice

Services, Immigrant Rights & Education Network (SIREN)

Silicon Valley Democratic Socialists of America

Together We Will — Palo Alto/Mountain View

Youth United for Community Action (YUCA)