

Flores, Valerie

From: Mohammad Tajsar
Sent: Thursday, September 23, 2021 10:46 AM
To: Flores, Valerie; cityclerk
Cc: Perez, John Eduardo; Mermell, Steve
Subject: Pasadena PD's proposed acquisition of ShotSpotter technology
Attachments: 2021 09 23 Community Ltr opposing ShotSpotter.pdf

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Dear Ms. Flores,

Please find attached and copied below a letter from nine organizations urging the Public Safety Committee members to oppose the proposed acquisition of ShotSpotter technology, scheduled to be discussed at today's Special Meeting. Please make sure the attached letter is forwarded to the Committee and entered into the record.

We request, for the reasons set forth in the letter, that the Committee not advance this proposed acquisition.

Thank you,
Mohammad Tajsar
Resident, District 1
ACLU of Southern California

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Mayor Victor M. Gordo
Councilmember Tyron Hampton
Councilmember John J. Kennedy
Councilmember Steve Madison
c/o Mark Jomsky
City Clerk
Pasadena City Hall
100 North Garfield Ave.
Pasadena, CA 91101

September 23, 2021

RE: PASADENA POLICE DEPARTMENT'S PROPOSED ACQUISITION OF SHOTSPOTTER TECHNOLOGY

Dear Public Safety Committee members,

We the undersigned urge you to vote against the Pasadena Police Department's proposed \$640,000 purchase of a subscription for ShotSpotter, a gunfire detection surveillance technology, and to instead commit to invest public funds in life-affirming social and public services for the residents of this community.¹ Surveillance technology like ShotSpotter is harmful to overpoliced communities in the City, widely recognized as unreliable and inaccurate, and a gross misallocation of scarce public funds at a time of great need in our neighborhoods.

First, numerous analyses and investigations have cast serious doubt about the efficacy of ShotSpotter's technology and the Department's claims about its purported benefit to public safety. Just last month, a comprehensive analysis conducted by the City of Chicago's Inspector General concluded that the Chicago Police Department's extensive use of ShotSpotter "rarely produce[d] documented evidence of a gun-related crime, investigatory stop, or recovery of a firearm," and that it instead it causes officers to "rely[] on ShotSpotter results in the aggregate to provide an additional rationale to initiate stop or to conduct a pat down once a stop has been initiated."² Another analysis conducted in St. Louis found that the technology "has little deterrent impact on gun-related violent crime in St. Louis" and did "not provide consistent reductions in police response time, nor aid substantially in producing actionable results."³ We have no reason to expect different results here in Pasadena.

Second, the deployment of this questionable technology has led to very real harms for communities across the country, harms which we are likely to face should the Department successfully acquire this technology. Instead of reducing crime in Chicago, for instance, ShotSpotter produced thousands of dead ends

¹ September 23, 2021 Agenda, Pasadena Public Safety Committee, <https://cityofpasadena.net/commissions/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2021-09-23-Special-Public-Safety-Committee-Meeting-Agenda-1.pdf>.

² City of Chicago Office of Inspector General, *The Chicago Police Department's Use of ShotSpotter Technology* (Aug. 24, 2021), <https://igchicago.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Chicago-Police-Departments-Use-of-ShotSpotter-Technology.pdf>.

³ Dennis Mares and Emily Blackburn, *Acoustic Gunshot Detection Systems: A quasi-experimental evaluation in St. Louis, MO*, *Journal of Experimental Criminology* (forthcoming) (June 2021), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337869476_Acoustic_Gunshot_Detection_Systems_A_quasi-experimental_evaluation_in_St_Louis_MO.

for officers, created a false justification for officers to conduct threatening and illegitimate detentions and arrests, and harmed—rather than improved—the safety of vulnerable people in the city. The company itself has also been found to alter the information it collects by “frequently modify[ng] alerts at the request of police departments—some of which appear to be grasping for evidence that supports their narrative of events.”⁴

Third, we can expect the acquisition of this technology to harm the most vulnerable populations in this city who have been overpoliced, oversurveilled, and undervalued in recent years. The Department’s report to this Committee says that it intends to deploy ShotSpotter sensors in areas its own analysis show are “most impacted by gun related crimes.” Roughly translated, the Department intends to use this technology to further increase its presence and footprint in Black and brown communities in Pasadena, including in our City’s Northwest. The inevitable result will be further frisks, contacts, detentions, seizures, and arrests—none of which are likely to deter violence, and all of which are likely to make residents feel *less* safe and *less* welcome in their communities.⁵ Coming on the heels of the mass public uprisings against police violence and abuse in this country, and the urgency with which local residents within this City have demanded change, the acquisition of technologies like ShotSpotter will retard, rather than advance, the pursuit of safety, security, and justice in Pasadena.

It is little wonder, then, that cities across the country that previously used ShotSpotter—San Antonio, Charlotte, and Troy, to name a few—dumped it after constant false alarms and lack of perceptible impact on public safety. We therefore find it deeply concerning to see the Pasadena Police Department seek \$640,000 for a “trial” of this troubling technology.

For the reasons set forth above, we ask that this Committee reject this acquisition.

Signed,

ACLU of Southern California
ACLU Pasadena/Foothill Chapter
Coalition for Increased Civilian Oversight of Pasadena Police
Heavenly Hughes, Co-founder and E.D. of My TRIBE Rise
Indivisible
Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Greater Pasadena
NAACP Pasadena Chapter
Pasadenans Organizing for Progress
Pasadena Privacy for All

CC: John Perez, Steve Mermell

⁴ Todd Feather, *Police are Telling ShotSpotter to Alter Evidence From Gunshot-Detecting AI*, VICE (July 26, 2021), <https://www.vice.com/en/article/qj8xbq/police-are-telling-shotspotter-to-alter-evidence-from-gunshot-detecting-ai>.

⁵ For an example of research demonstrating the harms of increased, proactive police contact with youth of color, see, e.g., Juan Del Toro et al., *The criminogenic and psychological effects of police stops on adolescent black and Latino boys*, PNAS Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 116(17), 8261–8268, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1808976116> (noting that “[p]olice stops predict decrements in adolescents’ psychological well-being and may unintentionally increase their engagement in criminal behavior”).