



Esteemed Commissioners of the Equal Rights Commission:

My name is Dr. Emily Sterk and I am here today speaking on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Milwaukee County.

Among one of the League of Women Voters public policy positions on criminal justice is the “reliance on evidence-based research in decision-making about law enforcement programs and policies” (*Impact on Issues* 120). To cite the deluge of evidence-based research that has proven that technology does not exist outside of humans’ own biases and racism would require me much longer than the allotted 3 minutes that I have to speak today. For the sake of time, I will just cite one governmental study by the National Institute of Standards and Technology that showed that when using Facial Recognition Technology, Black and Asian faces were up to 100 times more likely to be misidentified than white faces.

For this reason, the League of Women Voters of Milwaukee County, along with 17 other community organizations, signed onto the ACLU of Wisconsin’s coalition letter urging the Milwaukee Common Council to adopt a two-year pause on any new surveillance technology while policy is developed and passed to regulate existing technology. In this letter, we also voiced our support for the implementation of a Community Control Over Police Surveillance (CCOPS) ordinance in Milwaukee. We are here today to reiterate our stance: the City of Milwaukee must ban the Milwaukee Police Department’s current use of Facial Recognition Technology and implement community input and oversight through CCOPS.

The League of Women Voters, along with the Milwaukee Turners, have been monitoring the Fire and Police Commission since 2020. Because of Act 12 and its removal of the FPC’s policy making authority Chief Norman can develop any official policy he chooses. Chief Norman has repeatedly underscored that he respects the input of both the Fire and Police Commissioners and our community, yet it is revealing that there is no Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) outlining the MPD’s current use of FRT and that the Chief has not changed his stance on FRT even when all of us are here today, when Fire and Police Commissioners themselves are vocally against its implementation, and when two-thirds of the Common Council have come out in opposition to FRT.

Facial Recognition Technology is developing faster than we can study and understand it. In these unprecedented times, we cannot turn to FRT simply because it is a free tool available to the Milwaukee Police Department. We do not know how the federal government might decide to use FRT to make examples of people – of Black and AAPI communities, immigrants, demonstrators, and people seeking reproductive and gender-affirming care.

This past Saturday, I attended the community meeting to discuss Chief Norman's reappointment. In that meeting, I asked Chief Norman if he could reassure us that our information – that our civil liberties – will not be passed over the federal government. His response: he couldn't guarantee protection. That, esteemed Commissioners, is reason enough alone to ban the MPD's use of Facial Recognition Technology. I urge you to please use your power as the Equal Rights Commission to recommend to the Mayor and to the Common Council that they ban FRT in Milwaukee.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emily K. Sterk'.

Emily K. Sterk, Ph.D.