

18 June 2025

City of Milwaukee Equal Rights Commission

ATTN: Chair Tony Snell

Milwaukee City Hall

200 E. Wells Street

Room 606

Milwaukee, WI 53202

Hello,

I am writing to the Equal Rights Commission (ERC) to express my opposition to the Milwaukee Police Department (MPD) acquiring its own facial recognition technology (FRT). This letter is relevant to the June 18, 2025 meeting of the ERC during which the topic of FRT is on the agenda with a limited amount of time allocated to public testimony.

The city of Milwaukee has at least 5,727 CCTV cameras accessible to the MPD - that's 10 cameras per 1,000 people. We also know the MPD utilizes Stingray technology and drones to further surveil our communities. The addition of facial recognition technology is a serious threat to our personal privacy, political and religious expression, and our fundamental freedom to live our lives without having every movement and association secretly monitored and analyzed by law enforcement. There is a lack of transparency regarding how facial recognition data is collected, stored, and used, making it difficult for individuals to understand and control their privacy. Data is often collected en masse and without consent, adding to concerns over data breaches involving facial recognition data because facial images are unique identifiers that cannot be easily changed.

Facial recognition algorithms are notoriously inaccurate and racist, and this must be taken into consideration for our city where over half the population are people of color. A study done by the US federal government showed that African American and Asian faces were up to 100 times more likely to be misidentified than white faces, and the highest false-positive rate was among Native Americans. These surveillance activities raise major human rights concerns, especially when there is evidence that Black people are already disproportionately criminalized and targeted by the police. This technology has even led to false arrests. The potential for misuse of collected data, including identity theft, stalking, and harassment, is a major concern.

Right now, there are no published policies dictating how the Milwaukee Police Department uses invasive surveillance tools — or how the associated data is shared with federal law enforcement agencies like ICE, other state and local jurisdictions, or private corporations. Furthermore, the recent expansion of MPD's surveillance technology, in particular due to budget increases provided for the DNC & RNC, demonstrates that residents have little to no say in preventing MPD from expanding its surveillance capabilities.

I do not support discrimination and racism in our city, and this technology will only further equip the single largest, sanctioned perpetrator of these epidemics on our streets - the Milwaukee Police Department.

Thank you,

Hello, my name is Heba, she/her, and I'm here with local advocacy group Milwaukee4Palestine. I'm speaking in opposition to MPD's plans to acquire their own facial recognition technology. My position on facial recognition technology & software is that a full ban is the only way to prevent the violations of civil & human rights that always, without fail, accompany the use of facial recognition technology, which I'll refer to as FRT at times.

I'll use my time today to read the petition letter that was launched YESTERDAY by Milwaukee4Palestine. In the last 32 hours, 630 people and counting signed this statement, addressed to the ERC. These are residents of the city, people who work and spend time here, all of whom signed this letter in opposition to FRT. I've brought with me copies of the letter to represent each signature, as well as a copy of the comments left on the petition by those who signed. I'll leave all of these for you.

The letter:

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US federal government showed that African American and Asian faces were up to 100 times more likely to be misidentified than white faces, and the highest false-positive rate was among Native Americans. These surveillance activities raise major human rights concerns, especially when there is evidence that Black people are already disproportionately criminalized and targeted by the police. This technology has even led to false arrests. The potential for misuse of collected data, including identity theft, stalking, and harassment, is a major concern.

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Finally, I want to address something brought up by two others now and I want to hammer home. I've heard Heather, the MPD's propagandist, say at every public hearing about FRT. WE DON'T HAVE TO BE HERE ENGAGING WITH THE PUBLIC. After hearing this three times, it's apparent this is not a casual remark made out of defensiveness but a genuine talking point and attitude held by MPD. I seriously wonder if you hear the message there? A public department thinks they're doing us a favor by engaging with the public whose taxes fund the harm they commit against the public. I also take issue with the idea they're engaging with the public. Giving condescending reports on their decision to acquire FRT - which blatantly ignores widespread opposition from the public - is not engaging the public. Listening to our dissent and ignoring it is not engagement. Please don't believe their propaganda. Every police department that acquires FRT ends up using it with racist or misused outcomes - and the police departments that have used FRT to falsely arrest people, or have cases of individual officers using FRT to STALK people, have surely had SOPs that didn't stop these outcomes. Period. There is no good way to utilize FRT that also protects our rights. I & 630 of my neighbors implore you to use whatever influence you have to stop the MPD plan to acquire FRT, which to me means fundamentally racist technology.

Comments from Signatories of the Petition: *Say NO to Facial Recognition Technology in Milwaukee*

Last updated June 18 at 1:55pm CT. Each comment is separated by a line break. Presented without edits.

"No FRT in Wisconsin, period.

There is no safety benefit that outweighs the dangers and harm it causes"

We need money for schools and public services. Not more for the police! Especially technology that has been tested and developed as a weapon of war.

It used to be tapping our phones was an absurd paranoia. Lot's changed in 25 years, maybe it shouldn't have. Maybe it should stop.

No facial recognition!

FRT is a huge violation of privacy and has the potential to violate human rights! Milwaukee does not need increased surveillance of private citizens and needs to focus its funding and resources towards efforts that will have a positive impact on our communities.

Fuck that

This technology will not make us safer, Milwaukee deserves better

NO

I'm fully against the MPD using facial recognition technology in law enforcement

No to Facial Recognition Technology!

I oppose and hope the use of FRT is reconsidered, as it will contribute to a surveillance state that infringes every citizens' rights to privacy.

DO NOT use facial recognition technology. It violates the rights of human beings to be safe and comfortable in public

This technology is dangerous and unnecessary.

This is abhorrent, with ample examples nationwide of vague facial recognition results being used to justify improper arrests without sufficient safeguards. Completely inappropriate, opening the door for abuse and profiling.

Facial recognition technology is an authoritarian tool to intimidate and control all citizens. The police are paid by us, they need to start working for us.

This is proven to be dangerously inaccurate. Over surveillance is fraught with racism and other dangers.

"Facial recognition has no place in Milwaukee especially under the current administration.

Also it takes to find yourself in inescapable danger is a few small lapses of caution.

When a man is running to attack you don't throw him a knife"

Not in my city

"Facial recognition disproportionately negatively impacts people of color, specifically darker skinned Black women. According to ACLU MN, Studies show the error rate for Black Women is 34.7% PLEASE DON'T INTRODUCE THIS TECHNOLOGY TO MILWAUKEE. "

We need investment in our communities, not further militarizing the police force and criminalizing the human beings who make up these communities.

Great technology when used appropriately. Think apprehending the Boston Bombers. Not to racial profiling at will.

We say no to first face recognition recognition system in Milwaukee area and Wisconsin in general NO!!!

Because facial recognition it's racially bias it should not be used yet.

Infringement of my rights!

Stop spying on us.

I completely oppose the use of Facial recognition in policing. Under the guise of neutral technology, it will perpetuate the profiling and bias against people of color and poor people.

Other cities have recognized the pitfalls of this step and I would like Milwaukee to choose against it too.

Facial recognition technology has been shown to be inaccurate when distinguishing between non-white faces. Using this technology would only heighten existing racial bias in policing. The money that would be spent on this technology should instead be invested in upstream interventions that address societal issues at the source, such as access to housing, food, healthcare, and education. Facial recognition is a violation of the right to privacy. Besides the glaring pitfalls and inaccuracies of the technology, mass surveillance does not lend itself to the pursuit of liberty and freedom. The potential for abuse of a facial recognition is massive. With all Federal overreach terrorizing our communities it would be irresponsible to implement this system. We need to lean away from our country's slide into an authoritarian surveillance police state, not into it. Putting this technology in our community would be unconscionable.

This needs to be more openly discussed. If it were ethical, why is it kept quite?

FRT is an inaccurate and racist tactic to further criminalize and surveil our community. This request to ban it isn't unrealistic; many cities have a ban on FRT. Let's add Milwaukee to the list.

increasing the prevalence of the surveillance state will be the final nail in the coffin of privacy in our lives. we will be in a panopticon, will the watchful eye of private capital always peering over our shoulder. not only is this an immoral way to allow a legal system to function, it would consolidate much data that would be incredibly easy to exploit for personal gain. anyone with access to this data, maliciously or with clearance, would easily be able to use this for their own ends.

Facial recognition technology use by police forces as yet another means of public surveillance is a breach of civilian safety and leads to inaccurate and prejudiced profiling

NO to facial recognition tech in Milwaukee!

"Have you watched Minority report? I have and it creeped me out, the idea that we can't travel freely in our own spaces without being wrongfully subjected to search or discrimination.

Furthermore facial recognition is based on mugshots taken when accused of a crime, not when judged guilty of a crime. Where is the due process in that? Say no to unconstitutional surveillance or be prepared to be counter sued for violation of our rights to illegal search. Stop the technology from replacing the judgement of trained professionals now."

Cybersecurity threats are at an all-time high and increasingly sophisticated, I'm certain the city does not want to be liable for information leaks or hacked equipment. No more Big Brother politics! don't do that fr

Facial Recognition Technology is unnecessary. I live in Milwaukee and I am against MPD using this technology. Surveillance will not make our city safer.

Facial recognition technology is dangerous in having poor oversight, reducing accountability for decision making on who "deserves" rights and freedoms, enables racial profiling by applying the thin veneer of a proprietary algorithm trained on racist data, and must be rejected. Racism in policing has no place here, and algorithmic profiling is not acceptable. We will all end up in masks if this abominable technology is allowed to proliferate without proper oversight and supervision to ensure it's not being misdirected at already marginalized and oppressed communities!

The fact that this is even seriously on the table is an affront to the ideals of liberty and freedom that this country claims to have been founded on. Any citizen should recognize this as gross civil rights violations to all.

Please use this funding you'd otherwise use for incarcerating our community member for education, transportation, and libraries!

FRT is highly susceptible to misuse and manipulation not just by local law enforcement, but international networks. There are far more risks to the public than benefits with this technology. Investments in pillars of support such as education, community resources, etc., are more effective and sustainable in mitigating harm, and it protects our privacy. FRT will perpetuate systems of harm, bog down the legal system with additional bureaucratic processing, do nothing to encourage civil behavior, and ultimately leave us vulnerable to malicious attacks. Anyone who agrees with this implementation demonstrates a desire for authoritarian overreach and a disdain for their constituents and neighbors.

NO to Facial Recognition Technology in Milwaukee

Please stop trying to find ways to incarcerate folks using bullshit tech. We know this doesn't work in communities of color.

Stop the surveillance stalker state.

All Milwaukee residents need to be safe, not surveilled!

Facial recognition technology is dangerous because it targets people for police action using error-prone and un-accountable computer code. It is wasteful as well, spending tax dollars on fashionable technology with no proven record of making people safe. Adding this technology to Milwaukee policing will encourage racial profiling, because FRT is known to replicate bias against Black and brown people. By targeting civilians unfairly, not only will an MPD that uses this technology violate their civil rights and expose them to violence, but it will likely face lawsuits as a result that will drain city money as well. There is simply no good reason to spend money on unreliable AI fads that only serve to put people in danger, line the pockets of tech executives, and pad MPD budgets. Keep people safe with proven methods like access to food and housing and clean parks instead.

The public does not want this

No! Not any city

The MPD doesn't need facial recognition technology to keep our communities safe. In fact, such technology makes me feel UNSAFE. Please do not allow it!

I vehemently oppose facial recognition technology in Milwaukee. Please reconsider the greater implications this would have on our community members and the ever encroaching threats it poses on our private lives in this digital age.

"Officials that are allegedly "protecting" the Constitution shouldn't need to cover the face.

"wHaT aRE tHeY HiDiNg?" - Dumbass Noem"

The software is full of technical flaws and prone to misidentification, in addition to the privacy concerns.

This technology will only serve to further victimize the citizens of Milwaukee instead of actually protecting them.

HELL TO THE NO?!?!

We don't need more biased technology

Not Facial Recognition Tech in Milwaukee Please!

This is a terrible idea

Please move these policing budgets to public health to build a stronger, safer, and healthier Milwaukee. Further investment in police infrastructure and technology is well intentioned when faced with violence but lacks science and political integrity to healthy outcomes. Policy funding perpetuates more crime, and does not reduce crime as promised. It's short-sided, does not work, and makes us all unsafe. Stand up and speak truth to stop bloated policing in Milwaukee. Facial recognition technology is too low quality a technology for my city to spend its citizens' money on. Say no to technology that has been shown to be racially biased, and yes to keeping our tax dollars in the community for evidence-based purposes.

Facial recognition is a tool to crack down on people exercising their first amendment rights!

TL;DR: Please say no to facial recognition for Milwaukee.

Absolutely not

Until facial recognition is improved to work well with any color skin, I urge Milwaukee not to adopt and use this software. It will add countless hours of lawsuits due to the diminished ability to identify people of color correctly. Innocent people will be targeted. Just like when Kodak film came out, it favored the white face. The same is happening for facial recognition. Let's get it improved first.

Absolutely NOT

I am against the proposed usage of facial recognition due to the high probability of error

I say No to facial recognition software in Milwaukee. Absolutely not!

FRT is unreliable, contributes to false arrests, systemic racism, and the feeling of being in a police state rather than a free city\country. I am a law abiding citizen with no criminal record and I have been a Milwaukee resident for over 20 years. I oppose the use of Facial Recognition Technology by law enforcement formally or informally.

Done

I'm 100% against facial recognition.

I spend 90% of my time in Milwaukee, helping the community through a number of organizations. We do not want FRT in Milwaukee! We have seen its devastating effects on individuals in cities it has been used, and it's why so many places have put bans on it already!

FRT is inherently biased and inaccurate, this has been proven time and time again. If you truly stood for equal rights, you would do everything in your power to ban it. Earn your title and so NO to FRT or resign and let an adult do the job.

I could see this going terribly wrong especially knowing MPDs history as is. So many people will be falsely identified. This just can't happen.

This is UNCONSTITUTIONAL and should not be allowed in the United States of America.

Absolutely not, and the 30 minute public comment period is intentionally anti-democratic

Overstepping into our privacy!

"I am a home owner in the city of Milwaukee. As a dark skin black resident of Milwaukee, I stand in strong opposition of this. Milwaukee deserves freedom from racial bias, racial terror, and racial profiling.

As a person living in Milwaukee, I don't give consent."

No facial recognition! It is deeply flawed technology, and privacy is more important!!

Absolutely NO facial recognition tech in Milwaukee!

We do not need a surveillance state. We do not want a state where the government has easier access to every part of our lives.

"The public who is paying for this through our tax dollars should know the plans for the use of this equipment and the plans for keeping this electronic information from getting stolen.

Who will have access to it and why. Who will not have access to it. "

NO FACIAL RECOGNITION --- Our privacy is our RIGHT!

How can we even think this is a good idea! Its like we are living in the twilight zone that you want thos type of dangerous technology in our state or country. Are we becoming a police state? I sure hope not!

Investing in a technology that is known to harm innocent people is not going to increase safety.

Increasing state-sanctioned surveillance does not decrease crime. Investing in the people that make up our communities is the only way to increase safety.

absolutely not

No facial recognition tech in MKE!

Juan Arevalo believes law enforcement should not use AI facial recognition software.

STOP FACIAL RECOGNITION TECHNOLOGY IN OUR POLICE DEPARTMENTS!

No more Big Brother ! Time for a #ReturnToPrivacy

Police should never outsource their JOB to technologies. No margin of error is an acceptable margin of error when we're paying you to protect our communities instead of terrorizing them. Do your jobs.

I am opposed to FRT in Milwaukee.

Lack of transparency around how facial recognition technology is extremely troubling as is further erosion of the fundamental right to privacy as guaranteed the Constitution. Police do NOT need this tech to enforce laws or protect the peace. This initiative is overreach and a breach of privacy rights. Money can be better spent on personnel and training to improve community outreach.