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September 13, 2026

Onslow County Board of Commissioners
Onslow County Government Center
234 NW Corridor Boulevard
Jacksonville, NC 28540

Re: Ending Onslow County's automated license-plate-reader program

Dear Chairman Tim Foster, Vice-Chairman Robin Knapp, and Members of the Board of Commissioners:

We write on behalf of DeFlockILM and the 3,962 residents who have signed our petition to remove automated license-plate-reader (ALPR) mass-surveillance cameras from the Cape Fear region. Of those signers, 92 live in Onslow County — your constituents — and 2,971, three in every four, live across the five counties of the Cape Fear. They are asking you to end this county's support for mass government surveillance.

In Onslow County, the Plate Ranger system is operated by Sheriff Chris Thomas's office and paid for out of the county budget this Board adopts. The Sheriff answers to the voters; the appropriation answers to you. As the body that funds the program, you hold both the authority and the responsibility to bring it to an end.

These cameras were deployed without a stand-alone public vote and without any meaningful opportunity for residents to be heard. Most people learned they were being tracked only after the network was already watching them. That is not how a free community consents to being surveilled, and our neighbors experience it as exactly what it is — a breach of trust.

They also believe it violates their constitutional rights. A network that photographs and logs every passing vehicle — every driver, every day, with no warrant and no suspicion of wrongdoing — is a general search of the innocent. The Fourth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States protects against unreasonable searches, and Article I, Section 20 of the Constitution of North Carolina declares that general warrants "are dangerous to liberty and shall not be granted." A permanent, searchable record of where free people travel is the modern general warrant our State Constitution was written to forbid.

Our neighbors keep returning to one plain question: if we are not doing anything wrong, why are you watching us? These systems turn the presumption of innocence on its head. They treat every resident as a suspect to be logged first and cleared later — the opposite of the individualized suspicion that law enforcement is meant to require. A community is not a lineup.

In Onslow, the Sheriff's Office runs a "Plate Ranger" plate-reader network rather than Flock — but the civil-liberty problem is identical: a system that photographs and logs innocent drivers, holds their movements for thirty days, and does so with no warrant and no public vote.

This is not a distant debate. On September 8, the New Hanover County Board of Commissioners voted 4-0 to cancel its Flock contract, after residents from across the political spectrum asked their government not to track them without a warrant. What was possible one county over is possible here.

Ending a warrantless tracking program is not being soft on crime. It is insisting that public safety and constitutional liberty are not opposites — and honoring the oath you took, as an elected official, to support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of North Carolina. A government that watches everyone in order to catch anyone forfeits the consent it depends upon.

We ask you to end Onslow County's automated license-plate-reader program — to decline to fund or renew the Plate Ranger program — and to require a recorded public vote before the county acquires any surveillance technology in the future.

The residents on our petition — and the neighbors still adding their names every day — are not asking for a promise that these cameras will be used carefully. They are asking you to reclaim a simple principle: free people are not a database to be searched. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss it.

Respectfully,

Mark Spencer Williams

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