

“Stop Flock” Campaign Lesson Learned #1: How did the movement prevail over Flock? What happens next?

In the lead article in this series, “A Victory—if You Can Keep It,” *Berkeley Speaks* describes the biggest strength of the Stop Flock campaign: the combined force of the privacy, anti-surveillance movement with the Sanctuary movement in solidarity with immigrant rights.

This Lessons Learned article explains the breadth and power of the campaign, and the lesson that it leaves for the community as it faces the next, critical round of the struggle over mass surveillance.

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May 7 was a temporary win. Technically, all the city council did was kick the can down the road. Five council members agreed that the City should hold a competitive bidding “RFP” process for mass surveillance, instead of an improper sole-source contract for Flock.

And yet, it remains a victory for the Privacy and Sanctuary movements. Here’s why.

Back in the fall of 2025, proponents of mass surveillance held the upper hand. On the council, only Cecilia Lunaparra expressed opposition to the expansion of the City’s engagement with the tainted Flock Group. But the proponents made several key mistakes:

- They overreached by asking for every hardware and software system that Flock offers, including drones and Flock Nova, which supplements ALPR data with sources from other companies and across the internet.
- They failed to take into account how committed Berkeley’s people are to the principle of Sanctuary.
- They did not anticipate the breadth and tenacity of the opposition.

The last failure may be the most important. By May 7, opponents on the council grew from Lunaparra’s lone voice to four of the nine members. Several of them, notably Bartlett and Tregub, credited the overwhelming opposition among their district constituents.

This means that the residents of Berkeley gave moral leadership to the elected leaders.

Hundreds of people demanded the council not just talk tough about Trump, but refuse to collaborate even indirectly with his deportation campaign.

The campaign was notable not just for the raw numbers of Flock opponents, but also the range they represented: organizations like the League of Women Voters, Indivisible Berkeley, East Bay Sanctuary Covenant, and Berkeley Copwatch, along with many

teachers and students. People with immigrant neighbors who live in fear every day. Activists concerned that they will be targeted by the Justice Department.

Wilhelmenia (Mina) Wilson is the respected Executive Director of Healthy Black Families, located in South Berkeley. [Ms. Wilson wrote to Berkeley Speaks](#) about the impact of mass surveillance on the Black community. She explained that for Berkeley, “the concerns that surveillance technologies raise about civil liberties, racial equity, and community trust are not abstract. They are grounded in recent history,” referring in part to the “[racist and anti-homeless text messages exchanged among BPD officers](#).” Many in the community experienced the investigation as incomplete, with lingering questions about accountability, transparency, and systemic reform.”

Ms. Wilson went on to state, “Surveillance technologies do not operate in a vacuum. They are layered onto systems already shaped by racial inequity and over-policing. Expanding these tools risks reinforcing patterns of disproportionate impact on Black communities and other marginalized residents—particularly in a city actively working to repair harms rooted in redlining, displacement, and systemic injustice.”

What’s next?

As we explained in our lead article, Flock is not ruled out from applying through the RFP process, and BPD leaders have already stated that Flock is their preferred provider. So while the decision to go to competitive bidding is a good practice, it appears likely that the end result will bring Berkeley back to the same dilemma it faced at the May 7 meeting.

At the same time, it is dubious that Flock’s competitors would provide a better alternative.

Berkeley Speaks’ original research shows that the other likely candidates have similar problems of collaborating with immigration authorities. Motorola’s Vigilant Solutions and Axon have strategic partnerships with DHS and ICE; Vigilant has [sent UC’s ALPR data to CBP](#). [Rekor Systems](#), similar to Flock, has a large ALPR database that ICE and CBP frequently access through a back door channel: state and local police departments.

In this chart, we examine both the actual practice of each provider, including the risk that their working model helps the federal government gain access to local data, and also what we know of their connections to federal agencies. The reader can see that while Flock has very advanced systems that may do more harm to privacy and civil rights, the other companies often have closer collaboration with immigration agencies.

Vendor	Practices	Associations
Flock Group Inc.	Their business model depends on building a centralized, nationwide surveillance network, creating a system that can bypass local laws.	Largest shareholder, Marc Andreessen, is close Trump ally. Considers DEI and immigration “two forms of discrimination.”

	ICE-supporting agencies have found multiple ways to acquire local data and supply to DHS. Federal agents use local and state police departments that contract with Flock—to track individuals for immigration-related investigations.	FBI considering buying access to Flock's entire ALPR database .
Vigilant Solutions (owned by Motorola)	ICE holds a multi-million-dollar contract (via data provider Thomson Reuters) to access Vigilant's massive LEARN database. (see ACLU) In May 2025 ICE spent \$5m on a subscription with Thomson Reuters to provide "LPR data to enhance investigations." In 2019 ACLU found that 9,000 ICE agents had access to Vigilant's data .	FBI considering buying access to Vigilant's entire ALPR database .
Axon	Ronald D. Vitiello is head of Axon's DHS program and strategy. "Proud to be part of Axon's incredible mission-driven team, helping to implement and uphold smart, secure border protection for our country."	Vitiello is former ICE director .
Rekor Systems	A Rekor database that holds LPR data from around the country is accessed by ICE, CBP, and DHS .	

No matter which surveillance provider Berkeley selects, the RFP concedes that neither the City and the vendor can say no to a court order to turn over records from the surveillance of our people. The RFP is echoing the earlier opinion from the City Attorney that "the City's defenses against a subpoena would be significantly...limited because federal law would likely preempt state laws prohibiting disclosure." The law on this subject is complex and it would be important to [read the entire opinion](#).

Even more disturbing, on May 1 the FBI announced its intention to buy access to an existing national ALPR network, probably from either the Flock Group or Motorola Vigilant. There would then be no constraints on their ability to access any information in the massive system. This story was first exposed by [404 Media](#). A follow-up story in [Newsweek](#) on May 19 explained, "Using ALPR data would allow the FBI to track a person's movements without the need to go through a judge and obtain a warrant—including those of millions of ordinary drivers who have never committed a crime."

This understanding about the close relationship between ALPR vendors and ICE, the power of the federal government to subpoena our data, and the intention of the FBI to acquire entire networks must be enough to make one thing clear to Berkeley's leaders:

Creation of an ALPR and other surveillance systems is tantamount to Berkeley handing all our sensitive information over to the MAGA regime in Washington.

The speed at which City staff are putting surveillance back on the council agenda, after community members roundly rejected it, may surprise activists. The explanation for this rapid timeline may be explained in one word: elections. If one more surveillance skeptic is elected to the council in November, it could be all over for both Flock and its competitors. Advocates will need to quickly ramp up their community organizing to engage this next round in the summer and fall.