



NATIONAL FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE®

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16 June 2014

The Honorable Harry M. Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Reid and McConnell,

I am writing on behalf of the members of the Fraternal Order of Police to advise you of our opposition to H. Amt. 815, which was adopted by the House to H.R. 4745, the “Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2015.” We urge the Senate to reject this amendment and strip it out of any final bill.

The amendment would prohibit funds allocated by the legislation from being used to purchase critical public safety equipment—automated license plate recognition (ALPR) technology. We believe that there is a fundamental misunderstanding as to how this technology is deployed and used by law enforcement and other public safety agencies. Many who voted in favor of the amendment may have done so because they believed this technology is being used by our national security apparatus to geotrack our citizens and monitor their movements. Indeed, the Dear Colleague letter circulated in support of this amendment was entitled, “Stop NSA-like geotracking of innocent Americans.”

This is not the case. To begin with, ALPR data is simply a photograph of a vehicle’s license plate in a public place at a particular point in time. Geotracking is the use of Global Positioning System (GPS) data to track over time the movement of a specific electronic device capable of emitting GPS location information. Conversely, ALPR data is collected anonymously without personally identifying information. A government agency with access to ALPR data may connect that data to personal information from a State’s vehicle registration system, but if they do so without a legitimate law enforcement or public safety purpose, then they are in violation of the Drivers’ Privacy Protection Act. Any other use of the data would be an unjustifiable violation of privacy and Federal law.

Thousands of local, State and Federal law enforcement agencies use ALPR data every day to generate leads in criminal investigations, apprehend murderers, respond to Amber and Silver alerts, find missing children, recover stolen vehicles, and protect our borders. Even something as simple as the use of cameras at traffic lights and toll booths has a beneficial impact on the safety of our roadways.

The FOP would also submit that the only difference between the use of ALPR technology and an officer taking down license plate information along with the time, date and location is the efficiency by which the data is collected. Every State in the Republic mandates that every vehicle have a mounted and clearly visible license plate for the specific purpose of contributing to public safety, whether the data is collected by a fellow citizen, law enforcement officer or camera.

With these facts in mind, it is our hope the Senate will undo the rash and ill-informed decision of the House to prohibit funding for such a basic public safety tool. We urge the Senate to strip this provision from H.R. 4745 and any other appropriations measures as they move through committee, conference and to the floor.

On behalf of the more than 335,000 members of the Fraternal Order of Police, I thank you both for your consideration of our views. If I can provide any further information about law enforcement's use of ALPR technology, please do not hesitate to contact me or Executive Director Jim Pasco in my Washington office.

Sincerely,


Chuck Canterbury
National President

cc: The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski, Chairman, Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Richard S. Shelby, Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations