

May 9, 2008

Council of the District of Columbia
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004

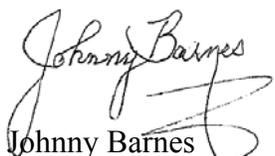
Dear Councilmembers:

We are writing jointly to urge you to affirm the action of the Council's Public Safety and Judiciary Committee and eliminate the nearly \$900,000 from the D.C. homeland security budget for funding of the Video Interoperability for Public Safety ("VIPS") program. As the Public Safety and Judiciary Committee recognized, there are many unanswered questions about the Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency's (HSEMA) plans to consolidate and centralize monitoring of thousands of video surveillance cameras. These questions need to be answered, and proposed policies and procedures need to be prepared, before the Council should consider funding any new network.

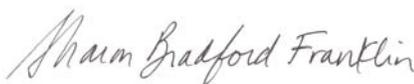
We commend the Public Safety and Judiciary Committee for scheduling a public hearing on the VIPS program for later this month. At that hearing, Councilmembers should examine the intended law enforcement purpose for the VIPS program and explore whether a centralized network of thousands of cameras throughout the District is a cost effective and appropriate strategy to serve that law enforcement purpose. HSEMA should especially explain why it has decided to monitor schoolchildren as part of this surveillance system. Why is it necessary for the Homeland Security office to watch the movements of elementary school students? Even if Councilmembers determine that some new network would be appropriate, it is important to assess carefully which cameras and how many of them should be part of such a network. Further, before any funds are appropriated, HSEMA should develop, with public input, a robust privacy policy to govern operation of such a network. It is critical that the District preserve the important privacy and civil liberties safeguards currently in place relating to the Metropolitan Police Department's use of video surveillance cameras.

Thus, Councilmembers should affirm the Public Safety and Judiciary Committee's decision to reject the current funding request for the VIPS program. We look forward to continuing to work with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Johnny Barnes
Executive Director
ACLU of the National
Capital Area



Sharon Bradford Franklin
Senior Counsel
Constitution Project



Melissa Ngo
Senior Counsel
Electronic Privacy
Information Center

cc: Mayor Adrian Fenty