

February 10, 2026

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
California State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, California 95814

Director Dina El-Tawansy
California Department of Transportation
1120 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Covert Automated License Plate Readers

To Governor Newsom and Director El-Tawansy,

The undersigned organizations write today to alert you to the prevalence of U.S. Border Patrol (USBP), Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) automated license plate readers (ALPRs) that have been placed—often covertly—along California highways, particularly along state border highways. With USBP Chief Greg Bovino reported to be returning to El Centro Sector, after leading a brutal campaign against immigrants and U.S. citizens alike in Los Angeles, Chicago, and Minneapolis, it is urgent that your administration take action. CalTrans must revoke any permits issued to USBP, CBP, and DEA for these surveillance devices and effectuate their removal.

ALPRs are devices that capture the license plate and other identifying features of vehicles and upload this data to a massive, searchable database. USBP uses ALPRs disguised as traffic barrels and flatbed trailers.¹ These systems allow USBP to track and target travelers, leading to stops, harassment, detention, seizure of money and vehicles, and potential deportation. As the Associated Press reported in November 2025:²

The predictive intelligence program has resulted in people being stopped, searched and in some cases arrested. A network of cameras scans and records vehicle license plate information, and an algorithm flags vehicles deemed suspicious based on where they came from, where they were going and which route they took...

¹ See attachment.

² Associated Press. "Border Patrol is monitoring US drivers and detaining those with 'suspicious' travel patterns." Nov. 20, 2025. <https://apnews.com/article/immigration-border-patrol-surveillance-drivers-ice-trump-9f5d05469ce8c629d6fecf32d32098cd>

Suddenly, drivers find themselves pulled over — often for reasons cited such as speeding, failure to signal, the wrong window tint or even a dangling air freshener blocking the view. They are then aggressively questioned and searched, with no inkling that the roads they drove put them on law enforcement's radar.

DEA similarly uses ALPRs disguised as traffic barrels and has installed several other systems parallel to USBP checkpoints.³ DEA operates the National License Plate Reader Program in collaboration with USBP parent agency CBP.⁴ Under the Trump administration, DEA's responsibilities have expanded to include immigration enforcement.⁵

California law prevents state and local enforcement agencies from sharing ALPR data with out-of-state agencies, including federal agencies involved in immigration enforcement.⁶ However, USBP and DEA are bypassing these regulations by installing their own ALPRs.

Researchers have identified more than 40 of these covert ALPRs along highways and roads in San Diego and Imperial County that we believe may belong to USBP, DEA, or other federal agencies that share the data with USBP.⁷ In response to a June 2025 public records request, CalTrans has released several documents showing CBP/USBP and DEA have applied for permits for ALPRs, with more expected as CalTrans continues to locate records responsive to the request.⁸ In addition, records obtained from the Arizona Department of Transportation show that USBP and DEA regularly apply for and receive permits before installing ALPRs in the right of way.⁹

³ Example of a DEA permit to install ALPRs in San Diego County.

<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/26808480-1116-nsv-0629/>

⁴ Drug Enforcement Administration. "Privacy Impact Assessment for the National License Plate Reader Program (NLPRP) and DEA Special Intelligence Link." Dec. 20, 2024.

<https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2025-01/DEA%20NLPRP%20DEASIL%20PIA%20Revision%20-%20Final%2020241220.pdf>

⁵ NBC San Diego. "DEA special agent in charge of San Diego discusses immigration, US-Mexico border." March 8, 2025. <https://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/san-diego-dea-agent-immigration-border/3772700/#>

⁶ Cal. Civ. Code § 1798.90.55(b).

⁷ Map of ALPR locations in San Diego and Imperial Counties. The ownership of the individual ALPRs are usually not visibly indicated. However, the technology corresponds with federal contracts and known practices. Some ALPRs included in the map may be in the right of way of other government entities. <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/1/edit?mid=1IBmF94s37WkKLSQ-8bSvlufeKYNzZU&usp=sharing>

⁸ Initial two document releases from CalTrans in response to a June 2025 California Public Record Act request. <https://www.documentcloud.org/projects/223895-caltrans-encroachment-permits/>

⁹ ADOT Permit Permit 1225458. <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/26513909-southwest-permit-1225458/>

As you know, Bovino began leading USBP agents to abuse their authority in the waning days of the Biden administration by bringing his team to Kern County to engage in illegal stops in January 2025.¹⁰ He led the efforts to terrorize Los Angeles and other parts of California, including publicly attacking sanctuary cities and the governor's own efforts to protect our most vulnerable community members.¹¹ More recently, he was in charge of operations in Minneapolis that led to the shooting deaths of two American citizens, Renee Good and Alex Pretti. Bovino refused to hold officers accountable, and instead blamed the victims for their own deaths.¹² On January 26, the Trump administration announced that Bovino would be returning to El Centro.

California must not allow Border Patrol and other federal agencies to use surveillance on our roadways to unleash violence and intimidation on San Diego and Imperial Valley residents. We ask that your administration investigate and release the relevant permits, revoke them, and initiate the removal of these devices. No further permits for ALPRs or tactical checkpoints should be approved for USBP, CBP, or DEA. CalTrans can install warning signs or obscuration near these devices as the process advances.

Thank you for your urgent attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Electronic Frontier Foundation
Imperial Valley Equity & Justice
ACLU California Action
Alliance San Diego
American Federation of Teachers Guild, 1931
American Friends Service Committee - US/Mexico Border Program
Border Angels
CBFD Indivisible
California Nurses Association
Center for Human Rights and Privacy
Comité de Acción del Valle Inc.
Democratic Socialists of America - San Diego
Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC)
Fight For the Future

¹⁰ ACLU of Southern California. "Court Bars Border Patrol's Unlawful Stop-and-Arrest Practices." <https://www.aclusocal.org/press-releases/court-bars-border-patrols-unlawful-stop-and-arrest-practices/>

¹¹ CalMatters. "The Trump regime targets California's sanctuary status at the expense of the American creed." July 21, 2025. <https://calmatters.org/commentary/2025/07/trump-targets-sanctuary-expense-american-creed/>

¹² Politico. "Bovino claims Border Patrol agents are 'the victims' in deadly Minneapolis shooting." <https://www.politico.com/news/2026/01/25/bovino-border-patrol-agents-minneapolis-victims-00745702>

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Imperial Liberation Collaborative
Imperial Valley for Palestine
Japanese American Citizens League
Japanese American Citizens League, Greater Pasadena Chapter
Japanese American Citizens League, Berkeley Chapter
Japanese American Citizens League, Florin-Sacramento Valley Chapter
Japanese American Citizens League, San Francisco Chapter
Japanese American Citizens League, South Bay
Japanese American Citizens League, Torrance
Jobs to Move America
Just Futures Law
Oakland Privacy
Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans
queercasa
Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) San Diego
San Diego Immigrant Rights Consortium (SDIRC)
South Bay People Power
San Diego Privacy
Southern California Immigration Project
Survivors of Torture, International
The Becoming Project INC
TRUST SD Coalition

Cc:

Chair Cortese, Senate Transportation Committee
Chair Cabaldon, Senate Privacy, Digital Technologies and Consumer Protection Committee
Chair Wilson, Assembly Transportation Committee
Chair Bauer-Kahan, Assembly Privacy and Consumer Privacy

ATTACHMENTS

Examples of Covert ALPRs in California



ALPR disguised as a traffic barrel in Imperial County, California
Lat., Lon. 32.678330065136855, -115.6741081075581

Google Streetview: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/i7125DwHWhj92CQz7>



ALPR trailer in San Diego County, California

Lat., Lon. 32.60535873264876, -116.48332006056602

Google Streetview: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/vW6234SAriNzfGjZ>