

**OFFICE OF TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NEW  
YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEES ON TECHNOLOGY, PUBLIC SAFETY,  
PUBLIC HOUSING, AND OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS**

**Oversight - The Use of Surveillance in NYCHA Developments.**

**September 30, 2025**

Good morning, Chairs Gutiérrez, Salaam, Banks, and Brewer and members of the Committees on Technology, Public Safety, Public Housing, and Oversight and Investigations. My name is Brett Sikoff and I am the Executive Director for Franchise Administration and Broadband for the Office of Technology and Innovation (OTI). I am here today with Chantal Senatus, OTI's Deputy Commissioner for Legal Matters and my colleagues from the New York Police Department (NYPD) and the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) to discuss our respective roles in facilitating public safety enhancements at certain NYCHA developments.

Big Apple Connect is the nation's largest municipally subsidized broadband program, providing free high-speed internet and basic cable access to over 330,000 New Yorkers in 220 NYCHA sites. The program is incredibly popular, with 82% of all eligible households enrolled in Big Apple Connect. On Monday, Mayor Adams announced the three-year extension of Big Apple Connect through June 2028 and a new \$1.2 million investment by Big Apple Connect providers Charter and Altice toward digital literacy programming that will benefit public housing residents.

The competitive pricing we secured with Charter and Altice ensured the maximum benefit for the least cost, including the ancillary opportunity to leverage Big Apple Connect pricing to facilitate NYPD's video integration effort. We defer to NYCHA and NYPD to share additional details regarding their agreement with respect to that program.

At OTI, we are committed to bettering the lives of all New Yorkers through technology. We are incredibly proud of our efforts to bridge the digital divide – especially the continued success of the Big Apple Connect program.

With that, I will take any questions the committees may have.

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Tuesday, September 30, 2025

**STATEMENT OF INSPECTOR ANTHONY MASCIA  
NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT**

**BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL  
COMMITTEES ON PUBLIC SAFETY, TECHNOLOGY, PUBLIC HOUSING AND  
OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS**

**COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
SEPTEMBER 30, 2025**

Good morning, Chair Salaam, Chair Gutiérrez, Chair Banks, Chair Brewer, and members of the Council. My name is Anthony Mascia. I am an Inspector in the New York City Police Department and I serve as the Commanding Officer of the Department's Information and Technology Bureau. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Department's use of NYCHA cameras in connection with our criminal investigations.

Video footage—in NYCHA housing and across the city—is a vital tool in the Department's efforts to keep the people of New York City safe. When crimes are captured on video, NYPD detectives can use that video to identify and apprehend the perpetrators. Even if a crime itself is not on video, we may be able to use video footage to corroborate key elements of a victim's account or see where a criminal fled. Sometimes, video footage shows us that a victim or witness was mistaken about certain elements of what transpired. Video footage may implicate individuals in criminal conduct, and it also may exonerate them.

Reconstructing events using video footage can be painstaking work. Particularly if someone is moving about, our detectives may need to pull together clips from numerous cameras to determine what transpired. Speed is of the essence. The sooner we see those videos the sooner we can bring a killer to justice, identify a key witness, or rule out a suspect. Delays in obtaining video footage are impediments to achieving justice for victims and are obstacles to public safety.

Historically, detectives conducting investigations on NYCHA property have had to physically retrieve video footage from a NYCHA office, during business hours, on a DVD or thumb drive. NYCHA does maintain an emergency access unit for obtaining video footage after hours, but even in the best of circumstances this process is time-intensive and laborious. It slows our detectives down.

Direct camera access solves this problem. About ten years ago, under the previous mayoral administration, NYCHA allowed the Department to use fiber cable to give the Department direct access to some of NYCHA's video cameras. As a result, we have had access to a little over 7,000 cameras across 37 NYCHA buildings. That direct access has enabled the Department to solve crimes in NYCHA housing more efficiently and effectively and has improved safety in those buildings. For example, on May 9, 2025, at 8:45 p.m. a homicide occurred in a NYCHA building in the 7th Precinct. Because we had direct access to the relevant cameras, NYPD detectives were immediately able to view the video and determine the suspect's direction and method of flight. On July 14, 2025, at approximately 2:30 pm, an individual was shot in a NYCHA building in the 32nd



Precinct. Again, detectives were able to use direct access to NYCHA cameras to quickly identify the shooters. And this past December, detectives in the 120th precinct with direct access to a camera on NYCHA property were able to immediately identify the perpetrator of an attempted murder. These are just a few of many examples. The bottom line is that direct camera access eliminates delays in criminal investigations in which every second counts.

With the new internet access in NYCHA housing through Big Apple Connect, NYCHA is allowing the Department to have direct access to additional cameras without the need to install fiber cable. We have already obtained direct access to 68 additional cameras; we plan to gain access to approximately 1,900 more cameras across 19 NYCHA sites by November; and we intend to phase in additional camera access beyond that. This expansion of the Department's direct access to NYCHA cameras will significantly increase the speed and efficiency of our criminal investigations and will ultimately help reduce crime in NYCHA buildings.

I want to emphasize that the cameras to which we are getting access are preexisting NYCHA cameras. They are not Police Department cameras. We have access to them, but we do not control them in any way. All of these cameras are in hallways, lobbies, building entrances, or other locations outside the privacy of the home. I also want to note that the Department's access does not in any way slow down or interfere with the internet access that NYCHA residents have through Big Apple Connect.

Let me end by speaking as the former Commanding Officer of the 44th and 41st precincts. Community leaders were regularly asking for more cameras because they wanted what we all want: to be safe and to feel safe. They are a critical crime-fighting tool that allows us to uphold our commitment to every New Yorker, wherever they live, that we will do everything we can under the law to ensure their safety. Expanded direct access to NYCHA cameras will help us live up to that commitment.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and I look forward to answering any questions that you may have.



**JUMAANE D.  
WILLIAMS**

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**STATEMENT OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS  
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEES ON PUBLIC SAFETY, PUBLIC  
HOUSING, OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS, AND TECHNOLOGY  
SEPTEMBER 30, 2025**

Good morning,

I am Jumaane Williams, Public Advocate for the City of New York. I thank the chairs and the members of the committees for holding this important hearing.

Last month, New York Focus broke the news that the Adams Administration is using Big Apple Connect, its free internet program for public housing residents, to expand NYPD access to surveillance footage within NYCHA development common spaces.<sup>1</sup> The newly installed modems and routers allow the NYPD to remotely access footage directly, without physically visiting control rooms for the footage upon request, which was the previous protocol. Instead, the NYPD can “feed CCTV footage directly into its citywide surveillance software systems, stream it remotely in real time, and review footage beginning 30 days prior to an incident.”<sup>2</sup> This aspect of Big Apple Connect was never disclosed to the public. It should be noted that people living in public housing need programs like Big Apple Connect to bridge the digital divide, increase equity, and end disparities in internet access. Instead, what NYCHA residents got was a deepened divide between who gets to have privacy at home and who doesn’t.

By the end of 2025, the NYPD plans to connect surveillance cameras at 20 unnamed NYCHA developments to the Domain Awareness System, which allows the department to access thousands of CCTV cameras around the city, as well as environmental sensors and automatic license plate readers.<sup>3</sup> It also partners with privately owned CCTV cameras throughout New York City, and instantly compares data with multiple non-NYPD intelligence databases. In short, it allows the NYPD to watch the entire city at once. With access to an estimated 20,000 feeds, combined with other cameras and facial recognition technology, the NYPD can track virtually any individual in the city.<sup>4</sup>

New Yorkers living in NYCHA developments, who are overwhelmingly Black and Brown, often live with increased police presence and surveillance. Historically, NYCHA developments have

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<sup>1</sup> <https://nysfocus.com/2025/08/11/eric-adams-nycha-nypd-cameras-surveillance>

<sup>2</sup> <https://nysfocus.com/2025/08/11/eric-adams-nycha-nypd-cameras-surveillance>

<sup>3</sup> <https://theintercept.com/2020/07/14/microsoft-police-state-mass-surveillance-facial-recognition/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://banthescan.amnesty.org/decode/index.html>



had elevated crime rates compared to the rest of the city<sup>5</sup>—this is not surprising, considering low-income, under-resourced and densely populated neighborhoods tend to have higher rates of crime. NYCHA residents must contend with high-stress problems like unaddressed housing violations, such as a lack of heat and hot water, roaches and rats, crumbling infrastructure, and piles of garbage. In June, a whistleblower alleged that most of NYCHA’s 3,000 elevators aren’t being properly monitored to ensure that they’re working properly and are a “tragedy waiting to happen.”<sup>6</sup> For these pervasive and persistent violations, NYCHA buildings have repeatedly made my office’s Worst Landlord Watchlist.

To some degree, crime in NYCHA developments is a self-fulfilling prophecy: a 2022 study confirmed a public housing-to-incarceration pipeline, finding that census tracts in New York City with public housing have higher incarceration rates than census tracts without public housing, even though crime rates are equivalent.<sup>78</sup> Living in a certain NYCHA development can be considered as criteria to be added to the NYPD Criminal Group Database, also known as the “gang database”; residents of the Red Hook Houses have reported being profiled as gang members merely for where they live.<sup>9</sup>

Despite increased police presence and surveillance, people living in NYCHA developments are not safer. A report from the Department of Investigation published in March found that NYCHA security guards often routinely falsified timesheets while not showing up to work—including being absent for entire eight-hour shifts.<sup>10</sup> The city pays these security firms millions of dollars every year for services, as it turns out, they are not providing. DOI also found that 30 percent of NYCHA lobby doors are broken, and only 38 percent of fire guards were present at their posts during a random inspection. I am glad that NYCHA agreed to “substantially accept” 12 recommendations DOI made to improve oversight of these contracts, but we must remain vigilant to ensure that they are being followed.

All New Yorkers deserve to be safe and to feel safe—everywhere, but especially in their homes. It is not acceptable to conduct surveillance surreptitiously while utilizing resources in an unintended manner and—specifically services that are intended to decrease disparities and increase equity. It is extremely concerning, although not surprising, that this administration did so in secret, and the only reason we know about it is because of an article by New York Focus. Mayor Eric Adams cancelled the People’s Choice Communications contract negotiated by Mayor Bill De Blasio to provide free internet service to NYCHA residents. New York Focus received the contracts through a public records request that OTI delayed 16 times and only fulfilled after a lawsuit.<sup>11</sup> It appears that the mayor, OTI, and the NYPD knowingly violated the

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.thecity.nyc/2021/01/31/nycha-crime-prevention-shooting-spike-map-nypd-de-blasio/>

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<https://pix11.com/news/local-news/whistleblower-alleges-nycha-elevators-are-not-monitored-in-new-lawsuit/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9457320/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://justiceineducation.columbia.edu/study-reveals-pipeline-from-public-housing-to-prison-in-nyc/>

<sup>9</sup>

<https://www.naacpldf.org/press-release/g-a-n-g-s-coalition-calls-for-the-abolishment-of-nypds-gang-database-with-intro-798/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doi/reports/pdf/2025/14NYCHASecurityFireReleaseRpt03.26.2025.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://nysfocus.com/2025/08/11/eric-adams-nycha-nypd-cameras-surveillance>

Fourth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution against unreasonable searches and seizures. If so, I hope that anyone found to have made decisions that violated the law and violated the right to privacy of NYCHA residents face the appropriate consequences..

Thank you.



To: NYC Council  
From: Noel Hidalgo, Executive Director of BetaNYC



Re: STATEMENT ON NYPD SURVEILLANCE EXPANSION IN NYCHA THROUGH  
PUBLIC BROADBAND

September 30, 2025

To the the Joint Hearing,

## Introduction

BetaNYC is a civic organization dedicated to improving all lives in New York through civic design, technology, and data. We envision an informed and empowered public that can leverage civic design, technology, and data to hold the government accountable, and improve their economic opportunity.

Since 2013, we have advocated four freedoms of the 21st Century – Freedom to Connect. Freedom to Learn. Freedom to Innovate. Freedom to Collaborate.

The **Freedom to Connect** represents the idea that access to high-speed bi-directional internet is a prerequisite to full participation. Economic growth, job creation, educational opportunities, public safety, digital government services, and access to affordable health care depend on affordable and fast connectivity. In 1932, FDR emphasized the right of communities to provide their own electricity. Today, the City has the opportunity to deploy an infrastructure for universal access that will serve the public good.

## Statement on NYPD surveillance via Big Apple Connect

Big Apple Connect was meant to bridge the digital divide — not wire public housing into a citywide spy network. New York Focus' reporting that the Adams administration is linking NYCHA camera feeds directly to the NYPD's Domain Awareness System (DAS) via the Big Apple Connect broadband network should alarm every New Yorker. Public housing residents must not become unwitting subjects of unregulated surveillance in their own homes.

BetaNYC commends efforts to expand internet access — but this is not what we bargained for. Free broadband should empower communities, not funnel them into an ever-expanding data dragnet. The Domain Awareness System, already robust and opaque, collects real-time footage without warrants, and powers predictive policing and facial recognition tools that are prone to algorithmic bias.

The Public Oversight of Surveillance Technology (POST) Act was designed to give the public transparency into the NYPD's surveillance tools and policies. Using Big Apple Connect to

expand the DAS's reach into NYCHA without open hearings, clear disclosures, or resident consultation undermines the spirit — if not the letter — of that law.

We call on the Mayor's Office, City Council, and NYCHA leadership to press pause.

Any extension of surveillance into public housing must include:

- Full transparency about which developments are affected and what data is being collected or shared;
- Impact assessments, co-designed with residents, privacy advocates, and technologists;
- Guardrails and oversight — including independent audits, meaningful resident consent, and strict limits on data retention and use.

Public safety should be grounded in trust — not covert expansion of surveillance. Broadband access and civil liberties must go hand in hand — not be traded as opposing values.

Noel Hidalgo  
Executive Director of BetaNYC

BetaNYC's Statement

<https://www.beta.nyc/2025/08/13/statement-on-nypd-surveillance-expansion-in-nycha-through-public-broadband/>

**TESTIMONY OF:**

**Talia Kamran, Staff Attorney**

**BROOKLYN DEFENDER SERVICES**

**Presented before**

**New York City Council Committees on Public Safety, Technology, Oversight &  
Investigation and Public Housing**

**Oversight Hearing on The Use of Surveillance in NYCHA Developments**

**September 30, 2025**

My name is Talia Kamran and I am a Staff Attorney in the Seizure and Surveillance Defense Project at Brooklyn Defender Services. Brooklyn Defender Services (“BDS”) is a public defense office whose mission is to provide outstanding representation and advocacy free of cost to people facing loss of freedom, family separation and other serious legal harms by the government. We are grateful to the Committees on Public Safety, Technology, Oversight and Investigation, and Public Housing, and Chairs Salaam, Gutiérrez, Brewer, and Banks for inviting us to testify about the NYPD’s plan to expand its CCTV surveillance throughout the New York City Housing Authority’s (“NYCHA”) many public housing complexes.

For 29 years, BDS has worked, in and out of court, to protect and uphold the rights of individuals and to change laws and systems that perpetuate injustice and inequality. In July 2025, Brooklyn Defenders assumed the criminal defense contract previously held by Queens Defenders. We are proud to now provide excellent legal services in both Brooklyn and Queen. Our staff consists of attorneys, social workers, investigators, paralegals and administrative staff who are experts in their individual fields. BDS also provides a wide range of additional services for our clients, including civil legal advocacy, assistance with educational needs of our clients or their children, housing and benefits advocacy, as well as immigration advice and representation.

Many of the people that we represent live in heavily policed and highly surveilled communities. Low-income Black and brown communities bear the brunt of the New York Police Department’s (“NYPD”) privacy-destroying and harassing behavior, including through the wrongful seizure of



# Brooklyn Defenders

their personal belongings, the unannounced addition of their deeply personal information (including DNA profiles, social networks, and every day habits) into unregulated law enforcement databases like the gang database, and the unceasing subjection of “the privacies of life”<sup>1</sup> to police gaze through cameras, sensors, microphones, digital scraping tools, and their underlying, mass-aggregating databases like the Domain Awareness System (“DAS”). With the expansion of police-controlled cameras in NYCHA housing, tied to Big Apple Connect (“BAC”) Wi-Fi program—a free internet and cable program for public housing residents, the city is now extending that constant surveillance directly into people’s homes.

New Yorkers, and directly surveilled NYCHA residents, would not have known about this program at all were it not for investigative reporting.<sup>2</sup> The city did not disclose that Big Apple Connect was being leveraged to expand the NYPD’s live CCTV network until journalists brought it to light. We thank City Council for responding swiftly to that revelation by demanding a halt to the program,<sup>3</sup> and we agree that it must be stopped. This program violates the civil rights of NYCHA residents and unjustly places low-income New Yorkers under a microscope of government surveillance.

## **The NYPD and NYCHA Agreement and Surveillance Program is a Violation of the POST Act**

Under the POST Act, before deploying or expanding surveillance technology, the NYPD must publish an Impact and Use Policy (IUP) 90 days in advance and hold a public hearing so that New Yorkers can meaningfully weigh in.<sup>4</sup> The expansion of NYPD’s access to cameras into NYCHA housing clearly constitutes such an expansion: prior to Big Apple Connect, the NYPD maintained 37 livestream camera sites in NYCHA buildings; after the program’s launch, the Department reported 68 new CCTV cameras, and testified that it hopes to expand to 1,905 cameras by the end November 2025. This is unequivocally an enhancement of the Department’s surveillance capabilities, requiring an addendum to its CCTV IUP.<sup>5</sup> Instead, the NYPD and

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<sup>1</sup> *Carpenter v. United States*, 138 S. Ct. 2206, 2213–14 (2018) (“Although no single rubric definitively resolves which expectations of privacy are entitled to protection, the analysis is informed by historical understandings of what was deemed an unreasonable search and seizure when the Fourth Amendment was adopted. On this score, our cases have recognized some basic guideposts. First, that the Amendment seeks to secure the privacies of life against arbitrary power. Second, and relatedly, that a central aim of the Framers was to place obstacles in the way of a too permeating police surveillance.”)

<sup>2</sup> Zachary Groz, *Adams Quietly Uses Free Internet at NYCHA to Expand NYPD Surveillance*, N.Y. Focus (Aug. 11, 2025), <https://nysfocus.com/2025/08/11/eric-adams-nycha-nypd-cameras-surveillance>.

<sup>3</sup> Zachary Groz, *Councilmembers Demand NYPD Halt Its Public Housing Surveillance Expansion*, N.Y. Focus (Aug. 25, 2025), <https://nysfocus.com/2025/08/25/nypd-surveillance-nycha-big-apple-connect>.

<sup>4</sup> N.Y.C. Admin. Code § 14-188 (2025).

<sup>5</sup> Id. § 14-188(d)

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NYCHA initiated the Big Apple Connect-supported CCTV expansion without notifying the public, holding hearings, and without publishing a new or amended IUP. In doing so, the two agencies deprived NYCHA residents of the chance to examine, question, or challenge how their homes and lives would be subjected to new monitoring. The fact that this rollout was announced in stealth is itself emblematic of the NYPD's broader pattern of sidestepping transparency mandates of the POST Act.<sup>6</sup>

Even more troubling is the fact that this expansion is not limited to cameras alone. It is built on a municipal Wi-Fi program, and the public has received no explanation of the NYPD's relationship to that program. Wi-Fi technology itself is capable of surveillance. Academic research and industry applications demonstrate that Wi-Fi signals can be used to detect movement, track occupancy, and map human activity within spaces.<sup>7</sup> The POST Act defines surveillance technology as "equipment, software, or systems capable of, or used or designed for, collecting, retaining, processing, or sharing audio, video, location, thermal, biometric, or similar information, that is operated by or at the direction of the department."<sup>8</sup> The Department has not disclosed the terms of its agreement with NYCHA, nor has it specified what access it may have to BAC data. At minimum, the boundaries of NYPD's authority and use of Big Apple Connect should be clearly spelled out in an Impact and Use Policy.

## **NYPD Expanded Access to NYCHA CCTV Cameras Violate Residents' Fourth Amendment Rights**

The NYPD's planned expansion of CCTV surveillance within NYCHA through Big Apple Connect raises serious Fourth Amendment concerns. In public testimony at today's hearing, the Department stated that it currently has 68 cameras with live-stream capabilities to NYPD officers' phones via the Domain Awareness System application via Big Apple Connect. It intends to scale up to 1,905 by November 2025. With access to this many cameras under a unified system, the NYPD will be able to reconstruct the daily movements of hundreds of thousands of NYCHA residents. That kind of spatial-temporal mapping across doorways, hallways, common spaces, and adjacent walkways enables nearly continuous tracking of individuals' routines and associations.

The Supreme Court has made clear that the Fourth Amendment protects against this kind of prolonged and detailed surveillance. In *Carpenter v. United States*, the Court cautioned that

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<sup>6</sup> Talia Kamran, Testimony before the New York City Council Committees on Public Safety, Technology, and Oversight & Investigation (Feb. 19, 2025)

<sup>7</sup> MIT Technology Review, *How Wi-Fi Sensing Became Usable Tech* (2023).

<sup>8</sup> N.Y.C. Admin. Code § 14-188.

when technology enables the government to achieve “near perfect surveillance, as if it had attached an ankle monitor” to an individual, the Fourth Amendment requires a warrant.<sup>9</sup> More recently, the Fourth Circuit in *Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle v. Baltimore Police Department* struck down a program of aerial surveillance, holding that indiscriminate monitoring of residents’ movements across the city violated the Fourth Amendment.<sup>10</sup> The intrusion here is even more acute, because it occurs not in public streets alone but around residents’ homes—the place the Court has repeatedly described as “first among equals” in Fourth Amendment jurisprudence.<sup>11</sup>

If this program is permitted to continue, the NYPD should, at minimum, be required to obtain a warrant before accessing livestream or archived footage for investigative purposes. Absent judicial oversight, NYCHA residents could be subjected to round the clock, suspicionless monitoring of their daily lives in violation of the Fourth Amendment.

## **NYPD CCTV Disproportionately Surveils New Yorkers of Color in Violation of their Equal Protection Rights**

This expansion also raises urgent concerns under the Equal Protection Clause. NYCHA houses more than 528,000 New Yorkers of whom approximately 44 percent identify as Black and 42 percent identify as Hispanic or Latino.<sup>12</sup> Against this backdrop, it is clear that concentrating thousands of cameras in NYCHA developments will, by definition, disproportionately target people of color, magnifying the already staggering rates of harassment, suspicionless questioning, and stop-and-frisk practices that NYCHA residents already face. The effect is to transform stop-and-frisk into its digital equivalent, embedding racialized surveillance directly into the homes of New Yorkers of color.

The CCTV expansion was covertly launched, which means the public has no insight into how the NYPD selected its initial CCTV placements or how it intends to expand them. This absence of disclosure is itself a violation of the POST Act,<sup>13</sup> but it also prevents New Yorkers from

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<sup>9</sup> *Carpenter v. United States*, 585 U.S. 296, 297, 138 S. Ct. 2206, 2210, 201 L. Ed. 2d 507 (2018)

<sup>10</sup> *See Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle v. Baltimore Police Dep’t*, 2 F.4th 330, 346 (4th Cir. 2021) Holding that the Baltimore Police Department’s use of an aerial surveillance system capable of tracking the movement of all residents in Baltimore while outside, and which retained data on individuals’ movement for 45 days, constituted a search under the Fourth Amendment requiring a warrant in order to access to the data.

<sup>11</sup> *Florida v. Jardines*, 569 U.S. 1, 6, 133 S. Ct. 1409, 1414, 185 L. Ed. 2d 495 (2013)

<sup>12</sup> N.Y.C. Housing Authority, *Resident Data Summary 2023* (2024), <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/nycha/downloads/pdf/Resident-Data-Book-Summary.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> The POST Act requires the NYPD to disclose the disparate impact of its surveillance technologies. Should this program continue, the Department must, at minimum, publish within its CCTV IUP a full accounting of the disparate impact of this expansion on NYCHA residents. N.Y.C. Admin. Code § 14-188(b)(ii) (2025) (requiring

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understanding whether the Department is concentrating cameras in ways that will amplify existing racial disparities in policing. We cannot trust that these cameras are being placed in a nondiscriminatory manner when the NYPD has a storied history of racial discrimination in policing, particularly in NYCHA. *Floyd v. City of New York* revealed that the NYPD’s stop-and-frisk practices deliberately and disproportionately targeted Black and Latino residents. *Davis v. City of New York* more specifically found that the Department’s trespass enforcement practices in NYCHA subjected residents and visitors (overwhelmingly people of color) to unconstitutional stops and arrests. Those rulings reflect what legal advocates and NYCHA residents have long known: that NYPD policing in and around NYCHA has been racially discriminatory and harmful.

This CCTV program must also be understood within this history and the broader ecosystem of NYPD surveillance. Through ShotSpotter, predictive policing systems, license plate readers, the gang database, and technological device seizures, the Department directs its attention disproportionately toward neighborhoods of color. NYPD admitted in their testimony that they can capture screenshots from the video footage and run them through facial recognition systems, providing thousands more images of NYCHA residents for facial recognition databases. This practice also disproportionately feeds surveillance data on NYCHA residents into the Domain Awareness System compared to New Yorkers who don’t live in NYCHA, reinforcing a self-perpetuating feedback loop that entrenches the racial bias inherent in these surveillance technologies.

Biased data produces biased results: the more the NYPD trains its focus on communities of color, the more “evidence” it generates to rationalize further surveillance in those same neighborhoods. This harm is not abstract. This expansion means that NYCHA residents of color must live not only with the fear of being followed, stopped, or questioned on the sidewalk, but also with the knowledge that police may watch them in real-time all the way up to their own front doors. By embedding surveillance directly into the architecture of public housing, the NYPD communicates that these residents are uniquely unworthy of privacy and uniquely deserving of suspicion. Such unequal treatment offends the Equal Protection Clause and entrenches a two-tiered system of rights.

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each Impact and Use Policy to include “information regarding the potential disparate impacts of the surveillance technology, including whether the surveillance technology is disproportionately deployed in certain communities or has a disparate impact on any protected groups”).

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## Conclusion

The city must end the NYPD's collaboration with Big Apple Connect. A program intended to expand digital access for public housing residents should not be repurposed into a tool for mass surveillance. NYCHA residents deserve the same right to privacy in their homes as every other New Yorker, not to be singled out for suspicionless monitoring. Council should ensure that Big Apple Connect is rolled out as a resource for residents, free from NYPD control or surveillance, and should move quickly to stop this collaboration before it further entrenches discriminatory policing practices.

This program is likely to result in heightened surveillance, police harassment, and a rise in wrongful arrests targeting NYCHA residents. Rather than expanding ineffective and unlawful surveillance, the city should invest in community-based programs that have been proven to reduce crime, such as education, jobs, and healthcare. These approaches address the root causes of violence and build safer, stronger neighborhoods without relying on unlawful surveillance.

We are grateful to the City Council for your timely hearing on this critical issue. If you have any questions about our testimony, please feel free to contact Jackie Gosdigian, Senior Supervising Policy Counsel, at [jgosdigian@bds.org](mailto:jgosdigian@bds.org).





**Written Testimony Of**  
**The Center For Law And Social Justice**  
**at Medgar Evers College**  
**Before The City Council Committees On Technology, Public Safety,**  
**Public Housing And Oversight And Investigations**  
**Hearing On “The Use Of Surveillance In NYCHA Developments”**

**Presented by:**

**Roger Wareham, Esq.**  
**Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College**  
**1150 Carroll Street, Brooklyn, NY 11225**

**Lurie Daniel Favors, Esq., Executive Director**  
**Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College**

Good Morning to the Chairs and members of the convening Committees. My name is Roger Wareham and I am a Staff Attorney at the Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College ("CLSJ"). 2026 will mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CLSJ which was established as a community-based legal organization to address racial justice issues. CLSJ envisions a civically educated and engaged electorate that consistently builds political power to marshal the representation and resources necessary for its communities to thrive.

CLSJ seeks justice by providing effective legal advocacy, conducting community education campaigns, facilitating research and building organizing capacity on behalf of New Yorkers of African descent and the disenfranchised.

### **NYPD Clandestine Surveillance and the Rights of NYCHA Residents**

CLSJ believes that the recently unveiled New York Police Department ("NYPD") practice of surreptitiously using New York City Housing Authority's (NYCHA) video cameras raises serious questions of the unconstitutional abuse of the residents of and visitors to NYCHA properties.

CLSJ first extends thanks to the reporting of the New York Focus which doggedly pursued this story despite continuous attempts by the NYPD to conceal its use of NYCHA video equipment for its own heretofore undisclosed purposes.

The reported allegations indicate that the NYPD's Big Apple Connect Program is being used as a viaduct to connect the cameras in NYCHA properties directly to the NYPD's central digital surveillance system.<sup>1</sup> The Big Apple Connect Program is a three-year-old system providing free internet service to NYCHA residents. According to New York Focus, the NYPD surveillance has already been installed at one NYCHA development with 19 other sites scheduled to be connected.<sup>2</sup>

NYCHA has over 20,000 cameras in its developments. They cover "indoor and outdoor common spaces, like entryways, hallways, laundry rooms, lobbies and courtyard areas."<sup>3</sup>

This operation raises legal and ethical issues in regards to both the NYPD and NYCHA.

### **NYPD's Lack of Transparency – Violation of POST Act**

The first issue is the NYPD's demonstrable lack of transparency. The system was instituted without any public disclosure, nor apparently with the knowledge and consent of NYCHA residents and visitors. The law passed by this body (The Public Oversight of Surveillance

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<sup>1</sup> Groz, Zachary, "Adams Quietly Uses Free Internet at NYCHA to Expand Police Surveillance," New York Focus, 8/11/25

<sup>2</sup> Id. P. 2

<sup>3</sup> Id. P. 8

Technology Act - POST Act) requires that the NYPD must, prior to implementing new surveillance operations, publicly announce it.<sup>4</sup>

### **Centralization of NYCHA Surveillance into the Domain Awareness System**

The next issue is the integration of the surveillance data into NYPD's "Domain Awareness System (DAS)"<sup>5</sup> According to New York Focus' reporting, the NYPD is receiving real time video surveillance through NYCHA's cameras, bypassing the need for NYCHA approval. The DAS is a New York City-wide surveillance system originally developed to combat terrorism but which has since become a tool of day to day law enforcement. Its scope is enormous. The system is connected to 18,000 CCTV video cameras around New York City.<sup>6</sup> In 2017, it was reported that the system *has the ability to access data from roughly two billion license plate readings, 100 million summonses, 54 million 911 calls, 15 million complaints, 12 million detective reports, 11 million arrests, and two million warrants. The data from the CCTV cameras is kept for 30 days, text records themselves are searchable and the license plate readings for at least five years.*<sup>7 8</sup>

### **Possible Violations of NYCHA Residents' Constitutional Rights**

The NYPD's untrammelled access to NYCHA surveillance poses serious violations of NYCHA residents' and visitors' First, Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments rights.

Fourth Amendment considerations include whether use of these cameras by the NYPD violate tenants' rights against "unreasonable searches and seizures" and their reasonable expectations of privacy. The fact that this surveillance will be more than a one-shot observation but will enable a long and continuous monitoring of tenants' daily activities and movements could possibly constitute a search.

There may also be a Fourth Amendment challenge if the NYPD employs facial recognition or AI enhanced analytics on NYCHA cameras.

First Amendment considerations include whether knowledge that they are under police surveillance may discourage participation in tenant association meetings or like gatherings.

Given that NYCHA's population is predominantly low income, Black and Latino, this surveillance, even if neutral on its face, will have a discriminatory impact or intent, thus raising Fourteenth Amendment equal protection concerns.

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<sup>4</sup> New York City Public Oversight of Surveillance Technology Act.

<sup>5</sup> New York's Domain Awareness System: Every Citizen Under Surveillance, Coming to a City Near You,

<https://journals.law.unc.edu/ncjolt/blogs/new-yorks-domain-awareness-system-every-citizen-under-surveillance-coming-to-a-city-near-you/>

<sup>6</sup> Parascandola, Rocco (24 October 2018). "New NYPD surveillance cameras to cover stretch of Upper East Side not easily reached by patrol cars". *Daily News*. Retrieved 2025-09-29.

<sup>7</sup> Id.

<sup>8</sup> Sledge, Matt (13 March 2013). "The NYPD Is Watching: Cameras Will Be Able to Track Every Car Entering Manhattan". *HuffPost*. Retrieved 10 June 2019.

The above examples are just some of the questions which the NYPD should be required to answer before this program is allowed to go any further.

### **NYPD History of Violation of Constitutional Rights of Black and Latino Residents**

Coloring all of these concerns is the NYPD's history of Constitutional abuse of surveillance, particularly in relation to Black and Latino communities.

The NYPD has a long and disreputable track record vis a vis its abuse of the Black and Latino community. It was in response to this mistreatment of those communities that in 1988 CLSJ, despite its limited resources, set up a citywide volunteer hotline to monitor and report on escalating police misconduct.

The 1985 Handschu Consent decree<sup>9</sup> was designed to prevent illegal police surveillance of political activity. While it is still in effect, the Decree has done little to stop the NYPD from continuing to violate the rights of Blacks, Latinos and Muslims.<sup>10</sup> Floyd v City of New York<sup>11</sup> forced the NYPD to abandon its racist stop and frisk program which subjected hundreds of thousands Black and Latino (mainly) men to arbitrary stops, frisk, searches, illegal arrests and humiliation.

### **Unanswered Questions**

The following represent a sampling of questions that remain to be answered as a result of the previously noted concerns:

1. Why was the Big Apple Connect video program implemented in secrecy?
2. How long will the NYPD keep footage that it collects?
3. What will it be used for? Will it be redirected towards other programs?
4. Will Civilians have access to it, e.g. in lawsuits against the NYPD?
5. Who is monitoring this process and who should be monitoring it?
6. In which NYCHA development is it currently being used and why was that one chosen?
7. What are the locations of the other 19 developments scheduled to be included and why were they chosen?
8. What is the nature of this private-public partnership between the government and major corporations which have made this possible?
9. Do the returns on shareholder investment trump the protection of NYCHA residents' and visitors' constitutional rights?

### **Conclusion**

CLSJ realizes that there is a fine balance between the need for protection of NYCHA residents and visitors from criminal activity and the need for protection of NYCHA residents and visitors

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<sup>9</sup> Handschu v Special Services Div., 605 F. Supp. 1384 (S.D.N.Y. 1985)

<sup>10</sup> Zubair, Ayyan, "The Handschu agreement and NYPD Surveillance," stopspying.org, 7/5/ 2019

<sup>11</sup> Floyd, et al v City of New York, et al, 959 F. Supp 2d 540 (S.D.N.Y. 2013)

from illegal activity by the NYPD. We are very concerned that the Big Apple Connect program indefensibly sacrifices the latter. The City Council should halt this aspect of Big Apple Connect until the above questions are answered. The residents of New York cannot simply take the NYPD's words on what the surveillance operations represent. It has forfeited any right it may have had to be given the benefit of the doubt. The historic practices of the NYPD vis a vis violation of the rights of Black and Latino residents raise the need for rigorous and constant monitoring of its activities.

Thank you.



October 3, 2025

New York City Council  
Committee on Housing and Buildings  
Committee on Civil Service and Labor  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

Good Morning,

My name is Brendan T. Loftus, and I am the Director of the Member Assistance and Education Program for Local 1 of the International Union of Elevator Constructors. On behalf of our membership, I write today to express our strong support for Bill Introduction Number 1384, which would require training on mental health and substance use as part of Site Safety Training (SST) in the construction industry.

Every day, we see firsthand the toll that mental health struggles and substance use issues take on our workforce. Many of our members suffer silently, unsure of where to turn or how to talk about these issues safely on the job without fear of repercussions. Requiring this training as part of SST would create a vital opportunity to provide workers with resources, knowledge, and tools they need to address these challenges openly and constructively.

The stigma around mental health in the construction industry remains a profound barrier to change. Too often, workers feel that asking for help will be perceived as weakness or risk their livelihoods. By mandating education in this area, this bill sends a clear and powerful message that mental health matters—that it is every bit as important to jobsite safety as physical health. This is the culture shift we need to save lives.

The introduction of Bill 1384 is not simply about training hours—it is about breaking silence, creating a culture of safety that includes mental wellbeing, and giving workers the confidence to seek help without shame. We must start the conversation now if we are serious about preventing tragedies in our industry.

On behalf of Local 1, I strongly urge the Council to pass Bill Introduction Number 1384. This legislation will help save lives by ensuring that every worker in New York City construction is equipped with the understanding and resources they need to address mental health and substance use in a safe and supportive environment.

Respectfully,

Brendan T. Loftus  
Director  
Member Assistance and Education Program  
Local 1, International Union of Elevator Constructors

## **TESTIMONY**

The New York City Council  
Committees on Public Safety, Public Housing,  
Technology, and Oversight and Investigations

Re: Police Surveillance of New York City  
Housing Authority (NYCHA) Residents and Guests

NAACP Legal Defense  
& Educational Fund, Inc.  
40 Rector Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10006

October 3, 2025

Dear Council Members:

On behalf of the Legal Defense Fund (LDF), we thank the committee for this opportunity to provide testimony regarding several forms of police surveillance that residents and guests of New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) buildings confront regularly.

## **I. Introduction**

LDF is the nation's first and foremost civil rights and human rights law organization. Since its founding over eighty years ago, LDF has worked at the national, state, and local levels to pursue racial justice and eliminate structural barriers for the Black community in the areas of criminal justice, economic justice, education, and political participation.<sup>1</sup> As part of that work, LDF has also forged longstanding partnerships with local advocates, activists, and attorneys to challenge and reform unlawful and discriminatory policing in New York City. In 2010, LDF, with co-counsel The Legal Aid Society and pro bono counsel, filed *Davis, et al. v. City of New York, et al.*, on behalf of plaintiffs challenging the New York City Police Department's (NYPD) policy and practice of unlawfully stopping and arresting New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) residents and their visitors for trespass without the requisite level of suspicion and in a discriminatory manner.<sup>2</sup> In 2015, the *Davis* plaintiffs reached a settlement with the City that included full participation in the federal court monitoring of the NYPD that the court ordered in *Floyd, et al. v. City of New York*, the historic lawsuit that successfully challenged the NYPD's unconstitutional stop-and-frisk policies and practices as racially discriminatory.

Earlier this year, LDF joined with The Legal Aid Society, The Bronx Defenders, LatinoJustice PRLDEF, and the law firm Ballard Spahr to file a putative class-action lawsuit against the City of New York, challenging the NYPD's racially discriminatory targeting, surveillance, and criminalization of tens of thousands of Black and Latino New Yorkers through the use of the Criminal Group Database, widely known as the Gang Database.<sup>3</sup> The complaint asserts that the NYPD's practices and policies related to the Database violate the First, Fourth, and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution, as well as state and local laws. As outlined in the complaint and described in greater detail below, NYCHA residents and guests are especially vulnerable to inclusion in the Database.<sup>4</sup>

Our history of advocacy and litigation on behalf of NYCHA residents, with respect to criminal justice issues, gives us unique insight into the harmful and enduring impact that police surveillance has on their community.

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<sup>1</sup> *About Us*, Legal Def. Fund, <https://www.naacpldf.org/about-us/> (last visited Mar. 20, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> *Davis v. City of New York*, Legal Def. Fund, <https://www.naacpldf.org/case-issue/davis-v-city-new-york/> (last visited Mar. 20, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.naacpldf.org/wp-content/uploads/Final-2025.04.30-CGD-Complaint-1.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> *See, e.g., An Investigation into NYPD's Criminal Group Database*, NYC Dept. of Investigation 46-47 (Apr. 18, 2023) (The NYPD has designated some "NYCHA properties in their entirety as gang locations[.]" [hereafter "OIG Report"]).

## II. NYCHA residents are subjected to a heavy police presence and a high rate of unlawful stops.

One form of surveillance the NYCHA community endures is the unyielding physical presence of police in their buildings. Unlike private residential buildings, NYPD officers can randomly enter and patrol NYCHA buildings.<sup>5</sup> Abuse of this policy creates a second-class citizenship in public housing whereby residents of private buildings can live largely without police intrusion into their hallways and homes, while many NYCHA residents must live with constant police presence and often harassment. This circumstance leads to far too many police interactions for public housing residents, and far too many unlawful stops. In fact, Mayor Adams has encouraged the NYPD to engage in more “vertical patrols,”<sup>6</sup> a tactic that involves uniformed officers roaming the halls, stairways, and other common areas of NYCHA buildings in search of violations.<sup>7</sup>

Unsurprisingly, police enforcement in NYCHA often falls along racial lines. A report by the independent monitor in 2022 has shown that racial disparities in NYCHA policing has actually increased over the course of the monitorship.<sup>8</sup> In a sample of 350 stops conducted in NYCHA buildings after the implementation of body-worn cameras (BWCs), 33 percent of stops in NYCHA buildings were found to be unlawful.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the monitor found that 71 percent of people stopped in NYCHA were Black, a 9 percent increase from the time before BWCs were implemented,<sup>10</sup> even though Black people only comprise 43 percent of NYCHA residents.<sup>11</sup>

Subjecting NYCHA residents to overwhelming police activity creates a racially charged feedback loop that ensures their continued surveillance and harassment. Today, police increasingly rely on “hot-spot” and “place-based” strategies that use historic crime data, which is skewed due to racially biased policing practices and disinvestment in historically segregated communities, to determine the deployment of police resources. This ensures that the same NYCHA communities subject to saturated police enforcement and surveillance today cannot escape the snare of aggressive policing tomorrow.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *NYPD Patrol Guide 212-60*, N.Y. City Police Dep’t (June 27, 2016), [https://www.nyc.gov/assets/ccrb/downloads/pdf/investigations\\_pdf/pg212-60-interior-vertical-patrol-housing-authority-bldgs.pdf](https://www.nyc.gov/assets/ccrb/downloads/pdf/investigations_pdf/pg212-60-interior-vertical-patrol-housing-authority-bldgs.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Tina Moore & Georgia Worrell, *Eric Adams to Use Cops on Vertical Patrols to Boot Vagrants from NYCHA Halls*, NY Post (June 3, 2023), <https://nypost.com/2023/06/03/eric-adams-to-use-cops-to-boot-vagrants-from-nycha-halls/>.

<sup>7</sup> *Supra* note 5.

<sup>8</sup> See Seventeenth Report of the Independent Monitor: The Deployment of Body Worn Cameras on NYPD Housing Bureau Officers Assigned to Police Service Areas at 34, *Floyd v. City of New York*, No. 1:08-cv-01034-AT, (S.D.N.Y. Oct. 17, 2022) [hereinafter “Monitor’s 17th Report”].

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> *Supra* note 8.

<sup>11</sup> N.Y. City Hous. Auth., Resident Data Book (2022), <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/nycha/downloads/pdf/Resident-Data-Book-Summary-2022.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Rashida Richardson et al., *Dirty Data, Bad Predictions: How Civil Rights Violations Impact Police Data, Predictive Policing Systems, and Justice*, 94 N.Y.U. L. Rev. Online 15, 20 (2019) (“‘Deploying officers based on crime statistics will simply return them to where they concentrate their time. As a result, the data often push officers into the same over-policed and over-criminalized communities.’ This becomes part of what is known as the ‘bias in, bias out’ concern regarding predictive systems.”)

### III. The NYPD Gang Database acutely impacts the NYCHA community.

By design and implementation, the NYPD Gang Database creates particular risks for the NYCHA community.

The Database is a system of dossiers housed within the NYPD's Domain Awareness System,<sup>13</sup> which lists more than 13,000 New York City residents as members of so-called "street gangs" and youth "crews."<sup>14</sup> **Shockingly, Black and Latino people comprise 99% of Database entries,**<sup>15</sup> even though they together only represent roughly half of New York City's population.<sup>16</sup> Less than one percent of people in the Database are white.<sup>17</sup> Almost half of the people in the Database were entered when they were under the age of 23, and ten percent were minors.<sup>18</sup> The NYPD has added children as young as 11-years-old to the Database.<sup>19</sup>

In a 2023 audit of the Database, the Office of the Inspector General for the NYPD (OIG) found that the NYPD designates some NYCHA properties in their entirety as "gang locations."<sup>20</sup> The NYPD has even listed some NYCHA buildings as "gangs" themselves.<sup>21</sup> For example, the NYPD lists the following locations as "criminal groups" in the Database:

- "Neptune Ave from West 33rd to Bayview Ave.," which refers to the Gravesend Houses in Council Member Brannan's district.
- "3661 and 3663 Nostrand Ave.," which are part of the Sheepshead Bay complex in Council Member Narcisse's district.
- "Bronx River Houses" in Council Member Salamanca's district.
- "Unity Houses Blake Side" and "Unity Houses Sutter Side" in Chair Banks' district.
- "Dykman Houses" [sic] in Council Member De La Rosa's district.
- "Mariner's Harbor housing complex" in Council Member Hanks' district.

Another form of NYPD surveillance, social media monitoring, also fuels the Database. Documents from Freedom of Information requests show that the NYPD adds young people to the Database after scanning social media accounts and viewing pictures of them with friends or family in a so called "gang location." Once people are on the Database, the NYPD surveils, detains, and interrogates them for extended periods of time.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> OIG Report, *supra* note 4, at 4.

<sup>14</sup> Brittany Kriegstein, *NYPD and NYC Councilmembers Face Off Over Tracker of Alleged Gang Members*, Gothamist (Feb. 24, 2025), <https://gothamist.com/news/nypds-controversial-gang-database-to-face-scrutiny-at-nyc-council-hearing>.

<sup>15</sup> OIG Report, *supra* note 4, at 34.

<sup>16</sup> 2020 Decennial Census, U.S. Census Bureau, <https://data.census.gov/table/DECENNIALPL2020.P2?q=new+york+city> (showing that New York City's population is 28.7% Hispanic or Latino and 20.2% Black or non-Hispanic African American).

<sup>17</sup> OIG Report, *supra* note 4, at 34.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.* at 35 (showing that 10% of people in the database were minors when added and 38.6% were between 18-22 years of age).

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> *Id.* at 46.

<sup>21</sup> *Plaintiffs 1-3 v. City of New York*, No. 25-CV-2397 (BMC), Complaint ¶ 153 (E.D.N.Y. 2025).

<sup>22</sup> *Id.* at ¶ 422.



Our lawsuit challenging the Database tells the story of three people who live or grew up in NYCHA housing and have endured constant police presence in and around their family homes. They are regularly stopped, arrested for minor offenses like littering, detained for hours, and questioned about activity in their community that they have nothing to do with.<sup>23</sup> One plaintiff avoids driving because he has been pulled over so many times.<sup>24</sup> Another avoids bringing his young daughters to the playground at Mariners Harbor Houses because he does not want them to witness police harassing their father. The plaintiffs demonstrate that the police surveillance endured by NYCHA residents every day, such as inclusion in the Database, subjects residents to unnecessary and dangerous police interactions, alienates them from their family and friends,<sup>25</sup> instills in them a skepticism of public institutions,<sup>26</sup> chills their willingness to engage in free speech and association,<sup>27</sup> and causes heightened anxiety.<sup>28</sup> These harms are real and far-reaching.

#### IV. Conclusion

The NYCHA community deserves freedom from constant police harassment and surveillance. We urge the Council, in its role as the primary oversight body of the NYPD, to vigilantly root out and stop the physical and digital surveillance that keeps NYCHA residents under the watchful eye of police at all times. We further call on the Council to pass Int. 798, which would abolish the racially biased and unlawful Gang Database that has caused untold harm to New Yorkers, particularly those living in NYCHA.<sup>29</sup>

Respectfully submitted,

David Moss  
JPP Counsel, Justice in Public Safety Project  
NAACP Legal Defense and  
Educational Fund, Inc.

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<sup>23</sup> *Id.* at ¶ 261-396.

<sup>24</sup> *Id.* at ¶ 304.

<sup>25</sup> Red Hook Init., *Real Rites Research: Young Adults' Experiences of Violence and Dreams of Community-Led Solutions in Red Hook, Brooklyn* at 4 (Jan. 2019), <https://rhicenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/RealRitesReportFinal.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> See e.g., Tom R. Tyler, *Policing in Black and White: Ethnic Group Differences in Trust and Confidence in the Police*, 8 *Police Q.* 322, 322 (2005) (reporting that citizens will not use a criminal justice system they do not trust); Tom R. Tyler & Jeffrey Fagan, *Legitimacy and Cooperation: Why Do People Help the Police Fight Crime in Their Communities?*, 6 *Ohio St. J. Crim. L.* 231, 234, 263 (2008) (showing that people are more willing to cooperate with the police, report crime in their neighborhoods, and work with neighborhood groups when the police are seen as legitimate).

<sup>27</sup> *Id.* (“The fear of surveillance often leads to self-censorship, where individuals modify their behavior, communication, or actions to conform to perceived societal or surveillance norms. This self-censorship can manifest in various ways, from withholding personal opinions and engaging in self-expression to avoiding certain activities or discussions. Individuals may refrain from expressing dissenting opinions, engaging in creative or unconventional pursuits, or participating in activities they enjoy.”).

<sup>28</sup> *Id.* (“The awareness of being monitored may limit a person's ability to relax and be themselves . . . . This heightened state of alertness and self-consciousness can take a toll on mental well-being and may even lead to heightened stress and anxiety.”)

<sup>29</sup> N.Y. City Council, Int 0798-2024 (2024).



**TESTIMONY OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD DEFENDER SERVICE**

**before the**

**Committees on Technology, Public Safety, Public Housing, and Oversight and  
Investigations**

**IN RELATION TO**

**Oversight - The Use of Surveillance in NYCHA Developments**

**by**

**Elizabeth Bender**

**Senior Policy Counsel, Criminal Defense Practice**

**October 3, 2025**

Chairs Gutiérrez, Salaam, Brewer, and Banks:

I am Elizabeth Bender, Senior Policy Counsel with the Criminal Defense Practice at the Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem (NDS). NDS is a community-based public defender office that provides high-quality legal services to residents of Northern Manhattan. Each year, our attorneys represent nearly 8,000 clients in New York County's criminal, housing, and family court systems, as well as in federal immigration court. Our social workers and non-attorney advocates support clients by providing referrals to services, connections to benefits, and support throughout their legal cases.

We oppose the NYPD's surveillance of people living in NYCHA developments through the linkage of NYCHA CCTV cameras to the NYPD's Domain Awareness System. Subjecting New Yorkers to perpetual surveillance because they live in public housing threatens civil liberties for all, and especially young Black and Latino men. Expanding this surveillance regime without input from NYCHA residents themselves belies any claim by the NYPD that this effort is for the community it is supposed to be serving. The NYPD's handling of this expansion so far demonstrates the need for Council's intervention to stop the unwarranted surveillance and over-policing of people living in NYCHA communities.

### **NYPD Surveillance Feeds the Deeply Flawed Gang Database**

In Criminal Court and Family Court alike, we have seen how this technology infringes on our clients' rights. Clients who live in or visit NYCHA housing are monitored—spied on—by officers watching NYCA CCTV feeds remotely. Their movements, associations, and appearance are tracked. And based on those observations alone, they are included in the NYPD's gang database, whose flaws are [well documented](#). My colleague Michal Gross gave testimony at the September 30 hearing on this issue and shared the story of one of her young clients. In an effort to keep her client's case in Criminal Court—where he would be tried as an adult—rather than remove it to Family Court, the prosecution cited an NYPD allegation that the client was a gang member. The basis of this accusation was that an NYPD officer had seen the client over 50 times on live video surveillance in or around a NYCHA development, in the company of other young people alleged to be gang members. One of the young people was his family member. This footage was not collected as part of an ongoing investigation, but rather during routine surveillance of the housing project where the client and his family lived. In other words, the NYPD was tracking a child's movements in anticipation of him one day being accused of a crime so they could use this footage against him.

Being classified as a “gang member” and placed in the NYPD's gang database has serious implications for every aspect of our client's cases. It influences bail determinations. It drives prosecutorial decision-making. If the client is detained, it can impact where and with whom they are housed at Rikers Island or youth detention facilities, as well as how correctional staff treat them. Yet for all the impact the “gang member” designation can have, the NYPD makes very little effort to ensure its gang database is accurate. It includes children as young as 11 years old, and assigns labels to people based on conduct as innocuous as their use of a particular emoji in a social media post. We also know that 99% of the people the NYPD has labeled as “gang members” are Black and Latino. Expanding the NYPD's surveillance capacity to include access to live-streamed footage of NYCHA grounds will only exacerbate this problem, and perpetuate the over-policing of New Yorkers of color, particularly young Black and Latino men.

### **NYPD Already Has Ready Access to NYCHA Camera Footage**

In advance of this hearing—and in defense of its secretive spy campaign—the NYPD took to the [press](#) to claim that instantaneous remote access to perpetual surveillance of NYCHA grounds is necessary to investigate crime. But the NYPD already has full access to NYCHA CCTV footage, in most if not every NYCHA development. We have seen this play out time and time again in our clients’ cases: as soon as police respond to a call in NYCHA housing, they can view the CCTV instantly. Their access to it is delayed only by the time it takes for them to arrive to the scene. To the extent the NYPD is claiming it cannot obtain NYCHA footage while they investigate a crime, it can and should work with NYCHA leadership to address that. Allowing the police to monitor thousands of New Yorkers as they live their lives at home is a drastic and unnecessary solution.

This is in stark contrast to our ability to obtain footage from NYCHA cameras—even when our clients are detained and we are seeking footage that could exonerate them. While NYPD officers have round-the-clock access to NYCHA footage both on-site and at the NYCHA CCTV unit in Long Island City, our investigators must first request, in writing, that footage be preserved within 10-14 days, depending on the location of the cameras. Then, it can take as long as two weeks for NYCHA to prepare a DVD of the requested footage. An investigator must go in person to the NYCHA CCTV Unit in Long Island City to pick up the DVD. If it turns out that the DVD does not contain what we need, it will often be too late at that point to request more footage. Most NYCHA surveillance is preserved for only 21 days, with some sites deleting footage as frequently as every 14 days.

An exception to these short deletion periods is when the NYPD has already downloaded the footage. In those instances, our experience has been that even if the NYPD has not given the downloaded footage to the prosecutor, it will remain available if we request it from NYCHA past the normal deletion timeframe. (If the NYPD discloses the footage to the prosecution it must be turned over to the defense as discovery.) But, if the NYPD can view a constant livestream of footage from any location, it may lead to fewer downloads of that footage. An officer watching the livestream may quickly determine that something is not relevant—or that it contradicts the police’s version of events—and decide not to save it, which would subject the footage to NYCHA’s deletion policies. A defense lawyer or investigator would have to quickly request that exact same footage to avoid its deletion. In many cases we have no way of knowing what the police investigation entailed until months after our clients are arrested, including which surveillance officers may have viewed. That is especially true if they never save or download that surveillance. By the time we receive discovery from the prosecution, the footage will be long gone. But in cases where they downloaded the surveillance, at least we can obtain it later when we get more information. Giving NYPD access to livestreamed CCTV across NYCHA may lead to fewer officers downloading footage, which will mean less access to footage for the accused and their advocates. We strongly oppose this expanded CCTV access on these grounds.

We thank the Council and the Committees on Public Safety, Public Housing, Technology and Oversight and Investigations for its attention to and scrutiny of the NYPD’s efforts to surveil and target our clients and their communities.



40 Rector Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, New York 10006  
[www.StopSpying.org](http://www.StopSpying.org) | (212) 518-7573

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**STATEMENT OF  
ALISSA JOHNSON, LEGAL FELLOW  
SURVEILLANCE TECHNOLOGY OVERSIGHT PROJECT (“S.T.O.P.”)  
BEFORE THE COMMITTEES ON TECHNOLOGY & PUBLIC SAFETY,  
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL**

**SURVEILLANCE IN NYCHA DEVELOPMENTS**

**PRESENTED  
September 30, 2025**

Good morning, members of the New York City Council Committee on Technology. Thank you for organizing this important hearing.

The Surveillance Technology Oversight Project (“S.T.O.P.”) is a New York-based civil rights and anti-surveillance group that advocates and litigates against discriminatory surveillance. S.T.O.P. strongly opposes the incorporation of NYCHA cameras into the NYPD’s Domain Awareness System (“DAS”). As both committees assembled today have rightly noted, “New Yorkers did not agree to trade their right to privacy for the promise of free internet.”<sup>1</sup>

Without warning residents or the public, the NYPD has linked cameras at NYCHA developments into their DAS.<sup>2</sup> These cameras allow the NYPD to access live camera feeds, and search back through footage from up to 30 days prior.<sup>3</sup> In the years the Big Apple Connect program has been in development, NYPD and OTI failed to disclose and prevaricated about its surveillance component. Never in dozens of city council hearings, Q&As, press events, and publicly available documents did OTI or NYCHA mention that free Wi-Fi would come at the cost of 24/7 video surveillance. Meanwhile, internal OTI documents indicate that incorporation of the NYCHA cameras into DAS has been in the works since as early as 2022.<sup>4</sup>

Assimilation of NYCHA cameras into the NYPD’s Domain Awareness System expands the vast dragnet of surveillance that tracks New Yorkers going about their daily lives. The DAS surveils New Yorkers wherever they go, whoever they see, and whatever they do. This surveillance has a profound chilling effect on our fundamental right to free association and has a disproportionate impact on marginalized communities.<sup>5</sup> It exposes Black and Brown communities to rampant over-policing, puts immigrant families at risk, tracks movement to and from protests, and now surveils NYCHA residents in their own apartment buildings.

Any NYPD officer can call up a DAS dossier on any New Yorker on their smartphone.<sup>6</sup> Without a warrant, an officer can access a person’s appearance, vehicle registrations, social media accounts, 911 and 311 calls, social affiliations, and even DNA.<sup>7</sup> NYPD can run snapshots of this surveillance video through facial recognition systems, putting NYCHA residents at risk of false facial recognition matches and wrongful accusations. DAS searches also refer to NYPD’s notoriously racist gang database, which can expose people

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<sup>1</sup> Zachary Groz, “Councilmembers Demand NYPD Halt its Public Housing Surveillance Expansion, Following New York Focus Reporting,” *New York Focus*, August 25, 2025, <https://nysfocus.com/2025/08/25/nypd-surveillance-nycha-big-apple-connect>.

<sup>2</sup> Zachary Groz, “Adams Quietly Uses Free Internet at NYCHA to Expand Police Surveillance,” *New York Focus*, August 11, 2025, <https://nysfocus.com/2025/08/11/eric-adams-nycha-nypd-cameras-surveillance>.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Belle v. City Of New York*, 1:19-cv-02673, (S.D.N.Y. Dec 16, 2022) ECF No. 171.

<sup>6</sup> E.S. Levine et al., “The New York City Police Department’s Domain Awareness System,” *INFORMS Journal of Applied Analytics*, ahead of print, January 18, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1287/inte.2016.0860>.

<sup>7</sup> *People v. Gourdine*, No. 51031, slip op. (N.Y. Sup. Ct. August 9, 2024). *See also*, Levine, “The New York City Police Department’s Domain Awareness System,” *supra* note 6.



of color to suspicion and police stops for reasons as innocuous as wearing the wrong clothes, staying out late, attending the Puerto Rican Day parade, or posting a social media message like “Happy birthday gang.”<sup>8</sup>

We applaud the steps city council members have already taken to halt expansion of Big Apple Connect’s video surveillance component, and to demand transparency and accountability from OTI, NYCHA, and the NYPD. City council must not allow the NYPD to surveil NYCHA residents in this way. But, more broadly, New Yorkers will not be safe from omnipresent surveillance until DAS itself is dismantled.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

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<sup>8</sup> Plaintiffs 1-3 v. City of New York, 1:25-cv-02397, (E.D.N.Y. Apr. 30, 2025).



## TESTIMONY

The Council of the City of New York  
Committee on Technology jointly with the Committee on Public  
Safety, the Committee on Public Housing, and the Committee on  
Oversight and Investigations

An Oversight Hearing on The Use of Surveillance in NYCHA  
Developments

September 30, 2025

The Legal Aid Society  
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Good morning. I am Laura Moraff, a Staff Attorney in The Legal Aid Society's Digital Forensics Unit, which is a specialized unit that works on electronic surveillance and digital evidence issues in all five boroughs. I thank the Committees for the opportunity to provide testimony on the use of surveillance in NYCHA developments.

## **I. ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION**

Since 1876, The Legal Aid Society (LAS) has provided free legal services to New York City residents who are unable to afford private counsel. Annually, through our criminal, civil and juvenile offices, our staff handles over 180,000 matters for low-income families and individuals. By contract with the city, LAS serves as the primary defender of indigent people prosecuted in the state court system.

LAS is in a unique position to provide testimony involving NYCHA surveillance, given its organizational expertise in public housing, policing, and police technology. LAS's Public Housing Unit works to preserve homes and prevent eviction and displacement by providing critical legal services. Through our direct representation and law reform efforts, we promote healthy, stable, affordable housing for our clients and remove the systemic barriers that keep people trapped in cycles of homelessness. Legal Aid's Cop Accountability Project works to improve police accountability and transparency through litigation and advocacy against problematic policing policies.

In 2013, LAS created the Digital Forensics Unit to serve and support LAS attorneys and investigators. Since that time, we have expanded to two digital forensics facilities, five analysts, seven staff attorneys, one paralegal, and one director. Through investigation, research, and FOIL requests, the Unit works to maintain an up-to-date understanding of the surveillance technologies and practices used in New York City, so that we can better serve

our current and future clients in criminal, juvenile, and civil cases. We routinely work on cases involving NYCHA surveillance.

## **II. BACKGROUND ON SURVEILLANCE OF NYCHA PROPERTIES**

Low-income communities are routinely over-policed.<sup>1</sup> Public housing in New York City is policed both by the NYPD and by the public housing administration, subjecting NYCHA residents to more interactions with authorities and more intrusive monitoring than wealthier New Yorkers. Indeed, the NYPD's historical practice of heightened and discriminatory trespass enforcement activity in NYCHA housing is currently under federal monitorship.<sup>2</sup> LAS represents a class of New Yorkers in *Davis v. City of New York*, No. 10-cv-699 (S.D.N.Y.), one of three federal class action lawsuits challenging the NYPD's stop-and-frisk and trespass enforcement practices.<sup>3</sup> Yet, NYCHA residents continue to be stopped and questioned in intrusive and harmful ways. While NYCHA residents are surveilled by a host of problematic technologies—including ShotSpotter and drones—surveillance cameras are among the most pervasive tools for NYCHA surveillance.

At least three different camera surveillance systems operate in NYCHA developments: (1) NYCHA, also referred to as “Small Scale,” (2) NYPD Video Interactive Patrol Enhanced Response (“VIPER”), also referred to as “large scale,” and (3) NYPD ARGUS.

Despite being labeled the “Small Scale” system, the NYCHA camera system includes more cameras than the other two systems combined. The NYCHA system includes 17,756 cameras, 36 of which are shared by the NYPD VIPER system. Footage captured through this

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Lisa Lucile Owens, *Concentrated Surveillance Without Constitutional Privacy: Law, Inequality, and Public Housing*, 34 Stan. L. & Pol'y Rev. 131, 136 (2023).

<sup>2</sup> The monitorship arose out of three lawsuits challenging the NYPD's stop, question, and frisk practices and policies, which have now been combined. See *Davis v. City of New York*, 10-CV-0699 (AT); *Floyd v. City of New York*, 08-CV-1034 (AT); *Ligon v. City of New York*, 12-CV-2274 (AT).

<sup>3</sup> See *Davis v. City of New York*, 959 F. Supp. 2d 324, 352 (S.D.N.Y. 2013).

system may be retained for 14 to 30 days.

The NYPD VIPER surveillance system includes cameras that look similar to NYCHA cameras but may be hidden. Some of the cameras are located on rooftops of buildings or other areas inaccessible to NYCHA residents or the public, and some are deliberately camouflaged. NYPD personnel actively monitor the footage in real time, both on-site and off-site. The NYPD VIPER system includes 3,114 cameras in NYCHA developments (including the 36 shared by the NYCHA system).

The NYPD ARGUS system includes 90 cameras on NYCHA properties, but it is also a citywide system consisting of 3,500 cameras across all five boroughs. These cameras are typically labeled with the NYPD shield and uniquely numbered. Footage captured by the ARGUS system is retained for 30 days.<sup>4</sup>

Altogether, there are 20,924 surveillance cameras in NYCHA developments citywide, with 5,027 in the Bronx, 6,323 in Brooklyn, 5,525 in Manhattan, 2,979 in Queens, and 1,070 in Staten Island. These numbers are rapidly increasing. Over the past decade, NYPD and/or NYCHA have installed more than 9,000 surveillance cameras in NYCHA developments, and between January 6 and June 10 of this year, 352 additional cameras were added to NYCHA developments.

As of 2013, authorized personnel stationed at the Lower Manhattan Security Coordination Center (LMSCC) could access the NYPD ARGUS and NYPD VIPER systems at NYCHA housing developments.<sup>5</sup> But until recently, no NYPD personnel had direct access to

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<sup>4</sup> NYPD Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) Systems Impact & Use Policy (Oct. 26, 2023), [https://www.nyc.gov/assets/nypd/downloads/pdf/public\\_information/post-final/cctv-systems-nypd-Impact-and-use-policy\\_10.26.23.pdf](https://www.nyc.gov/assets/nypd/downloads/pdf/public_information/post-final/cctv-systems-nypd-Impact-and-use-policy_10.26.23.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> NYPD Detective Guide, Procedure No. 503-12, Effective Dec. 9, 2013, at 2 (on file with the Digital Forensics Unit).



cameras in the NYCHA system; if the NYPD wanted to access footage from NYCHA-operated cameras, they had to contact NYCHA and request to physically visit NYCHA's control rooms.

In August of this year, Zachary Groz of New York Focus reported that the NYPD was quietly linking cameras at NYCHA developments to its Domain Awareness System, a system that aggregates and centralizes data from multiple different surveillance tools and databases.<sup>6</sup> The NYPD can now feed footage from certain cameras in the NYCHA system directly into the NYPD's own systems, stream the footage remotely in real time, and review up to 30 days of NYCHA footage without requesting it from NYCHA.<sup>7</sup> The NYPD reportedly plans to similarly connect cameras at 20 more NYCHA developments, though it has declined to say which ones.<sup>8</sup>

### **III. EXPANDED INTERNET ACCESS SHOULDN'T MEAN INCREASED SURVEILLANCE**

The NYPD's surreptitious, suspicionless surveillance of NYCHA residents is, itself, cause for concern. But we were particularly alarmed to learn that plans for this increased surveillance and collaboration between NYCHA and the NYPD were intentionally shoehorned into the City's Big Apple Connect broadband initiative and deliberately withheld from the public for at least three years.

Big Apple Connect is an Adams Administration initiative designed to provide free Internet access to NYCHA residents.<sup>9</sup> The program partially replaced the de Blasio Administration's Internet Master Plan, which sought to provide universal Internet access in New York City by increasing competition among Internet service providers to drive down costs and

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<sup>6</sup> Zachary Groz, *Adams Quietly Uses Free Internet at NYCHA to Expand Police Surveillance*, New York Focus (Aug. 11, 2025), <https://nysfocus.com/2025/08/11/eric-adams-nycha-nypd-cameras-surveillance>.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> Jaclyn Jeffrey-Wilensky, *NYC Kills 'Internet Master Plan' for Universal, Public Web Access*, Gothamist (Dec. 5, 2022), <https://gothamist.com/news/nyc-kills-internet-master-plan-for-universal-public-web-access>.

provide opportunities for smaller, community-based providers.<sup>10</sup> Big Apple Connect instead relies on Internet giants Altice and Charter.<sup>11</sup>

The Adams Administration has touted Big Apple Connect as its means of bridging the digital divide with urgency and transparency.<sup>12</sup> But New York Focus recently learned that the Office of Technology and Innovation (OTI) also intended to use Big Apple Connect to expand the NYPD's surveillance capabilities in NYCHA developments. While the Adams Administration publicly professed a desire to create more transparency around Big Apple Connect, it also declined to disclose the surveillance component of the program in its many press events, Q&As, testimony at City Council hearings, and other publicly available materials. Without informing NYCHA residents, the Administration stealthily weaponized their Internet connection to enable the NYPD to directly monitor footage of their daily lives.

Gaining access to the Internet should not come at the cost of constant police surveillance. Reliable access to Internet is crucial in today's world. It is often necessary for full participation in commerce, education, community, and civic life.<sup>13</sup> Access to the Internet thus should not depend on income or housing status—nor should privacy from NYPD's remote gaze. NYCHA residents must be free to speak and receive information online alongside wealthier New Yorkers,

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<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> Jaelyn Jeffrey-Wilensky, *NYC Swaps Co-Op for Big Internet Providers at Bronx NYCHA Complex*, Citing 'Legal Dispute,' Gothamist (Feb. 3, 2023), <https://gothamist.com/news/nyc-yanks-small-internet-co-op-to-make-way-for-charter-altice-at-bronx-nycha-complex>; Emily Nonko, *What Happened to New York City's Internet Master Plan?*, Next City (Nov. 8, 2022), <https://nextcity.org/features/what-happened-to-new-york-citys-internet-master-plan>.

<sup>12</sup> Zachary Groz, *Adams Quietly Uses Free Internet at NYCHA to Expand Police Surveillance*, New York Focus (Aug. 11, 2025), <https://nysfocus.com/2025/08/11/eric-adams-nycha-nypd-cameras-surveillance>; *Mayor Adams Expands 'Big Apple Connect' to 17 New Sites, Free Broadband Now Available to 150,000 NYCHA Households*, Office of the Mayor (Aug. 1, 2023), <https://www.nyc.gov/mayors-office/news/2023/08/mayor-adams-expands-big-apple-connect-17-new-sites-free-broadband-now-available-150-000>.

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and they must be free to retreat to their homes and move about their neighborhoods without their movements and activities being constantly fed into a massive, centralized police surveillance hub.

For these reasons, LAS emphatically supports the demands made in the August 25 letter that Councilmembers Gutiérrez, Salaam, and Banks sent to OTI, the NYPD, and NYCHA:

1. An immediate halt to any expansion of the NYPD's access to NYCHA camera systems through Big Apple Connect.
2. A full accounting of which developments have been linked, under what authority, and with what data-sharing agreements in place.
3. A commitment that Big Apple Connect will return to its original purpose: providing residents with home and common-area internet access—not expanding police surveillance.
4. A transparent process, including consultation with residents and public hearings, before any new surveillance technology is pursued.
5. Full disclosure of any other vendors and/or contracts that have been agreed upon or in discussion to further this plan.<sup>14</sup>

Additionally, LAS urges the Council to demand that all NYCHA cameras that were linked to the NYPD's Domain Awareness System be unlinked, and that they not be relinked in the future.

#### **IV. OTI, THE NYPD, AND NYCHA MUST BE COMPELLED TO ANSWER PRESSING QUESTIONS ABOUT THEIR SURVEILLANCE OF NYCHA RESIDENTS**

Although the City Council gave OTI several opportunities to disclose the surveillance component of the Big Apple Connect program, OTI repeatedly declined to do so.<sup>15</sup> We know

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<sup>14</sup> See Zachary Groz, *Councilmembers Demand NYPD Halt Its Public Housing Surveillance Expansion, Following New York Focus Reporting*, New York Focus (Aug. 25, 2025), <https://nysfocus.com/2025/08/25/nypd-surveillance-nycha-big-apple-connect>.

<sup>15</sup> Zachary Groz, *Adams Quietly Uses Free Internet at NYCHA to Expand Police Surveillance*, New York Focus

about the NYPD's access to the NYCHA surveillance system today only because of New York Focus's diligent reporting on the matter. But OTI, the NYPD, and NYCHA have also been evasive and inconsistent with the press.<sup>16</sup> For example, NYCHA initially told New York Focus that Big Apple Connect was "not intended to support NYCHA's CCTV cameras," and then declined to comment on whether it knew that OTI was linking its cameras to the NYPD's Domain Awareness System.<sup>17</sup> An OTI spokesperson said in July that the agency was using Big Apple Connect for more efficient security and to enhance safety in public housing, but that "these are not live camera feeds that the NYPD has access to."<sup>18</sup> A few days later, the spokesperson said "There's no Big Apple Connect cameras."<sup>19</sup> Shortly thereafter, an NYPD spokesperson said that the NYPD does have access to NYCHA CCTV cameras, and that Big Apple Connect "does allow for real time access."<sup>20</sup> The NYPD has declined to disclose which NYCHA developments have been and will be included in its surveillance expansion efforts.<sup>21</sup>

Given the agencies' persistent lack of candor, it is crucial that documentation and communications regarding NYCHA surveillance be released to the public, and that the agencies be compelled to provide written responses to the most pressing questions. These questions include:

1. Who was involved in the decision to link NYCHA's cameras to the NYPD's Domain Awareness System?
2. When was the decision to link NYCHA's cameras to the NYPD's Domain Awareness System made, and when did NYCHA learn that its cameras would be used that way?

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(Aug. 11, 2025), <https://nysfocus.com/2025/08/11/eric-adams-nycha-nypd-cameras-surveillance>.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> Zachary Groz, *Five Unanswered Questions About Eric Adams's Expanded Surveillance at NYC Public Housing*, New York Focus (Aug. 12, 2025), <https://nysfocus.com/2025/08/12/unanswered-questions-adams-surveillance-big-apple-connect>.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

3. Which NYCHA developments have cameras that have already been linked to the NYPD's Domain Awareness System?
4. What was the intended timeline for linking NYCHA cameras to the NYPD's Domain Awareness System? Which NYCHA developments were being targeted to have their cameras linked to the NYPD in the future, and when was that process supposed to occur?
5. Who decided which cameras should be linked to the NYPD's Domain Awareness System, and on what bases were those decisions made?
6. How did the NYPD intend to use its expanded access to NYCHA footage?
7. Does the NYPD use facial recognition software on footage from the NYCHA cameras?
8. Does the NYPD use augmented reality or any other type of software to enhance footage from the NYCHA cameras?
9. Must NYPD officers get approval or meet any kind of standard before monitoring footage from NYCHA cameras in real time?
10. Which NYPD officers have access? Does anyone outside of the NYPD have access, and if so, who?
11. Why didn't OTI disclose the surveillance component of the Big Apple Connect program prior to New York Focus's reporting?
12. How will the agencies ensure that NYCHA residents are consulted about changes in NYCHA/NYPD surveillance practices going forward?
13. Which agencies besides NYCHA have cameras that the NYPD can currently monitor in real time?

We hope the City Council will compel answers to these questions and make the agencies' answers available to the public.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

The Legal Aid Society strives for justice in every borough for every New Yorker. Our clients who live in NYCHA developments, like all New Yorkers, deserve the liberty to move about their daily lives without police watching their every move. This remains true when they are

promised Internet access in today's digital age. We appreciate the Council's commitment to understanding how Big Apple Connect became a ruse to spy on indigent New Yorkers. We urge the Council to demand answers to the many remaining questions, and to demand that the NYPD disconnect from NYCHA's cameras.

# Testimony: Warrantless Surveillance in NYCHA

30 September 2025

Committee Chairs, Council Members:

My name is Art Chang. I've led technology innovation in New York City since the 1990s, including the NYC Votes program. I am an adjunct professor in Technology Management at Columbia University, a member of the [TechMayor project](#), the Board Chair of [CACF](#), and a former New York City mayoral candidate. I am here in my personal capacity and my views do not reflect those of the entities I represent.

Today, I'm testifying against the expansion of warrantless surveillance in NYCHA. The Adams administration gave the NYPD live access to video feeds via Big Apple Connect, "free" WiFi for public housing residents. New Yorkers received internet access without being told that police could monitor cameras in their buildings and hallways—effectively creating 24/7 surveillance without public consent [10][11].

As BetaNYC stated: "Big Apple Connect should close the digital divide, not open the door to unchecked NYPD surveillance. Public housing residents deserve both safety and privacy—not a trade-off between the two" [11].

This is not just about NYCHA. New York City is building a surveillance infrastructure modeled on systems American tech companies exported and built abroad. A September Associated Press investigation proved that IBM, Microsoft, Oracle, Cisco, Intel, HP, and Dell provided core technology for China's mass surveillance apparatus, later used to repress Uyghurs and other minorities [12][13].

New York is following that path, laying infrastructure, targeting communities, and sharing data with Federal agencies:

- The NYPD's Domain Awareness System, created with Microsoft, links over 18,000 cameras, 2 billion license plate scans, and millions of police records [14][15].
- The NYPD has deployed over 100 drones and used facial recognition in more than 22,000 cases, despite documented racial bias and wrongful arrests—such as Trevor Williams, jailed even though he was inches taller than the actual suspect [16][17].
- East New York, 54% Black, has one of the highest concentrations of surveillance cameras in the city [18].



- Federal agreements enable data-sharing with ICE via the Joint Terrorism Task Force, raising the risk of surveillance-enabled immigration enforcement [19].

**We still have the power to choose a different path. I urge immediate action:**

1. **Halt warrantless surveillance at NYCHA**, cancel drones, and suspend facial recognition until there are strong safeguards.
2. **Disclose all federal data-sharing agreements.**
3. **Pass a New York City version of the New York for All Act**, prohibiting sharing with ICE and restricting city participation in federal surveillance task forces.
4. **Reinvest surveillance funding into community needs.**

China's experience shows us the dangers of unchecked surveillance and ethnic targeting. New York can—and should—choose transparency, privacy, and accountability.

Thank you.

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10. [National Security and Local Police: Information Sharing with JTTFs (PDF)]([https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/publications/NationalSecurity\\_LocalPolice\\_web.pdf](https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/publications/NationalSecurity_LocalPolice_web.pdf)) (Brennan Center for Justice)

City Council Testimony

Committee on Technology - 9/30/2025

Michelle Currie, Brooklyn, NY

Big Apple Connect was meant to close the digital divide — not turn public housing into a citywide surveillance experiment. Linking NYCHA cameras to the NYPD's Domain Awareness System without resident input or transparency exploits communities. This unregulated surveillance erodes trust, violates privacy, and fuels biased policing. Broadband should empower residents. Public safety cannot come at the cost of civil liberties — stop weaponizing community hubs and public housing residents' homes.

Renee Keitt  
Elliott Chelsea Houses  
President  
Sept 30th

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING HEARINGS:  
**Oversight: Administration of Section 8 and Emergency Housing Voucher Program**

NYCHA was built as a system of public good collective housing that serves generations, not as a subsidy pipeline for private developers. The push to move people from Section 9 into vouchers and PACT developments flips this principle on its head. Housing should never be treated as a revolving door to private profit. It is a public responsibility and a public right.

We are told again and again that Section 8 funding is “more secure.” But the facts tell a different story. The House has already flat-funded tenant-based vouchers. Congress openly looks at Section 8 administrative fees as a place to cut. That is not secure, that is fragile. Section 9 remains the only true guarantee of permanent, affordable housing that is not subject to the uncertainty of annual appropriations or the whims of private landlords.

PACT’s promise was supposed to be private investment and better management. But the reality is failing buildings, terminated subsidies, rent hikes for tenants who don’t qualify for Section 8, and residents being forced out with vouchers after failed HQ inspections. Is this what the switch to PACT is truly about? This shouldn’t happen. Housing stability is the bedrock of life. It is not a privilege — it is a determinant of health for the individual and for society itself. When stability collapses, so does the wellbeing of entire communities.

The numbers bear out the dysfunction: 110,000 vouchers in circulation, 80,595 tenant-based, 29,875 project-based, 27,000 PACT-converted. And still, 46 vouchers have already expired without placement. The average wait time is 134 days. Thousands more sit in the pipeline. These numbers don’t tell a story of progress — they tell a story of gridlock, lost opportunities, and families left behind.

Meanwhile, HUD, HPD, and NYCHA fail to coordinate, leaving residents in confusion while rents rise and repairs languish. Oversight of PACT is reactive at best. NYCHA itself admits it cannot do this program on its own, yet it insists on handing over management of public housing to private developers without real accountability. That is not stewardship of the public good.

Every dollar being funneled into insecure voucher programs and private developers would be better spent reinvesting in Section 9 public housing — the backbone of housing stability in this city. Permanent, deeply affordable, publicly owned housing works. It is time to strengthen it, not dismantle it.

## **The Use of Surveillance in NYCHA Developments**

We are living under constant surveillance. This is not safety. This is not community care. This is not respect for public housing residents. Surveillance is not the same as safety and NYCHA residents know this all too well. Nothing is free. Our privacy has been stripped away without our consent. We did not ask to be watched. We did not agree to be monitored. Our homes, our supposed sanctuary have become places where we are filmed and tracked as if we are criminals.

FOIL requests were filed and postponed 16 times just to find out what is happening to us. It took an Article 78 lawsuit to even see the contract. Why was it hidden? Why is the truth so hard to get? Who approved this? Who signed off on violating our rights? Why was it made so difficult for residents to know what is being done in our own homes? This is not transparency. This is secrecy.

We now know that NYCHA allowed direct access to camera feeds without even telling residents. Nearly 1,925 cameras across 20 sites. No consent. No consultation. This is authoritarianism at the local level mirroring the worst surveillance abuses of the federal government. Eva Trimble has said NYCHA defers to the police on how the technology is used. But our homes are not police precincts. NYCHA cannot hand over our privacy and then say “it’s not our problem.”

We are told this is about safety. But safety for who? For residents, or for a narrative that paints us as threats? NYCHA communities are overwhelmingly people of color. We know what this looks like in practice. We know what it means when technology and policing meet in communities like ours. This is not community protection. This is control. This is the jail-to-prison pipeline, built into our homes.

Mayor Adams calls NYCHA residents “essential” to New York, yet his administration funds private developers through PACT and project-based Section 8, while betraying Section 9 and our privacy at the same time. If this administration truly valued us, it would protect our homes and our rights, not sell them off or turn them into surveillance zones.

We have not traded our privacy to be part of the 21st century. We have not exchanged our dignity to “facilitate opportunities” for others. We demand to be included in decisions that affect our lives. We demand public oversight of surveillance technology. We demand an end to secret deals and hidden contracts. We demand the truth.

The continuing example of decisions made without our input from PACT to surveillance is unacceptable. It must stop. Our homes are not laboratories for private developers. They are not holding cells. They are not open air jails. Housing stability and privacy are the bedrock of a

healthy life and a healthy society. It is time to treat NYCHA residents as citizens with rights, not as suspects to be watched.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ in favor ☒ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nichelle Blondmanville

Address: Queens

I represent: Public citizen

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LAYLA LAW-GISILCO

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: DISTRICT LEADER AD75/A

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: NOEL HIDALGO

Address: BRKLYN

I represent: BETANYC

Address: 121 6TH AVE, 6TH FL, NYC

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: BRETT SIWOFF

Address: NYC OTI

I represent: Exec. Dir. FRANCHISE ~~ADVIS~~

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chantal Senatus

Address: NYC OTI

I represent: Deputy Commissioner for

Address: Legal Matters.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Inspector Anthony Mascia NYPD

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: September 230

2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michele Anne Blondmonville

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: public testimony

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Beverly  
Michele Anne Blondmonville

Address: Queens NY

I represent: Public testimony

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 09/30/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alissa Johnson

Address: 40 Rector St

I represent: Surveillance Technology Oversight Project

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 9/20/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michal Gross

Address: 317 Malcolm X Blvd, 10th Floor

I represent: Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: David Moss (panel)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: The Legal Defense Fund

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ARTHUR CHANG

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: SELF

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. NYCHA Surveillance Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☒ in opposition

Date: 9/30/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Laura Moraff

Address: 49 Thomas St. New York NY

I represent: The Legal Aid Society

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Talia Kamran

Address: 177 Livingston St BK NY 11201

I represent: Brooklyn Defender Services

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☒ in opposition

Date: 9/30/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Droger WAREMAN

Address: 1534 Bedford Avenue Brooklyn

I represent: Center for Law & Social Justice

Address: 1534 Bedford Avenue Brooklyn

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**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 9/30/25

Name: Christopher Leon Johnson (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: SELF

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: Barbara Mandy (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: [REDACTED] Th Avenue

I represent: SELF

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Emily Gold, Director, Privacy Matters

Address: NYPD

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Brian Honan

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NYCHA EVP For Intergovernmental

Address: Affairs

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Eva Trimble

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NYCHA Chief Operating

Address: Officer

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms