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Flock concerns remain, despite contract approval



Citizens of Huntington sought out signatures to show opposition to the Flock camera contract signed by the City of Huntington. (The Parthenon/Phoenix Bishop)

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Mass surveillance, increasing safety measures and invasion of privacy have been the topic of an increasingly conflicting conversation between Huntington citizens and local government officials.

In July of 2026, Huntington City Council approved a contract with Flock Safety, a company founded in 2017 with the goal to assist law enforcement with detecting and responding to crime through the use of automated license plate readers (ALPR), drones, video cameras with audio detection and other services.

Since July, multiple meetings at City Council have taken place to discuss the details, terms and restrictions of the contract, with the most recent being Monday, August 24.

At the August 24 meeting, Ordinance 2026-O-72 was discussed further. This is the Flock Ordinance, which outlines public safety initiatives with the use of technology and specifically goes over restrictions for data retention, data sharing and transparency with the usage of ALPRs and other services.

The main concerns with Flock cameras have to do with facial recognition and profile building. According to the Flock Safety website, which features an AI sales assistant chatbot, the cameras (also powered by AI technology) do not have any facial recognition systems built in.

This means if cameras were to be placed around Huntington, or Marshall's campus, the cameras would not be able to get private information on a person from only seeing their face. However, law enforcement can then use video footage to get further information on a person.

Multiple protests have taken place in Huntington while the council discussed the future of Flock cameras. The contract proposal in July invoked Huntington Citizens Action Group (HCAG) to create a petition signing initiative, entitled Get the Flock Out, to ban AI surveillance systems.

Citizens have spoken at hearings, sharing concerns about violations of the Fourth Amendment, which states the right of the people "to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects against unreasonable searches and seizures…"

Marshall University political science professor, George Davis, spoke more on the possible fourth amendment violation and other concerns with the cameras.

Davis said, "The problem is there were no Flock security cameras when the Fourth Amendment was written. As life has become more complicated, there's more technology. How can we tell when our fourth amendment right ends and other people's right to security begins?"

Another concern with the cameras is the multiple cases of law enforcement officers using the cameras for personal vendettas that have been seen across the nation, such as a police chief in Georgia being arrested on stalking charges.

Michael Steffman was named chief of police of Brasselton, Georgia in May of 2025. In November of that same year, it was found that Steffman had been using ALPR to stalk his ex-partner's vehicle movements.

Steffman then committed suicide in April of this year before a trial could take place. Similar cases of police officers stalking romantic partners have been seen in Wisconsin and Kansas. As Flock becomes more widespread, the risk for these types of cases grows larger.

On a university campus, this raises the question of student privacy. Can a law enforcement officer track a student's movements like they would for a car? What about high school campuses where instead of adult students, they are all minors and cannot consent to data sharing or their faces being seen by the cameras?

As Huntington City Council moves forward with Flock Safety, these questions are prominent in citizen minds.

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