Darcy Castro
LEADERSHIP THAT PUTS PEOPLE FIRST

Educational Resources Series: ALPR Cameras

What Are ALPR Cameras?

Automatic License Plate Recognition (ALPR) cameras are a special type of surveillance camera that can automatically capture the license plate of a car.[1] Some more advanced cameras, like the ones Flock make, use artificial intelligence to identify other key features of a car, such as dents or bumper stickers.[2] Most cameras also use infrared cameras and illuminators, along with optical character recognition, so they can operate at night.[3] Each scan is typically saved with the time, date, and location of the vehicle, and this data is often stored in databases that can be shared across agencies and jurisdictions.[4] ALPRs are also widely used in private and commercial applications (like HOAs and retail parking lots).

What Does Law Enforcement Want?

ALPR cameras make law enforcement's job easier because they put more eyes on the road. If a crime is committed or an AMBER Alert is issued, ALPR cameras can help track the vehicles involved.[5] Some advanced ALPR systems don't even require a license plate number; officers can search for a car based on its make and model.[6] Supporters also argue that the cameras help recover stolen vehicles more quickly and let departments with limited staff cover more ground.[7]

Constituent Concerns

The increased usage of ALPRs has become controversial. The main issue arises when these cameras make mistakes, such as linking cars to crimes that neither the car nor its driver was involved in. News outlets have reported cases of people being pulled over and ordered out of their cars at gunpoint.[8] There have also been incidents of police officers accessing the data these cameras gather for personal use, with some using it to stalk former romantic partners.[9] Beyond individual mistakes, civil liberties groups worry that storing location data on drivers who aren't suspected of any crime creates a detailed record of their movements that can reveal where they live and work and discourage activities like protests.[10] Some places welcome ALPR cameras, however. They view the cameras as a way to reduce police presence in communities that have poor relationships with law enforcement, arguing that the cameras ensure police are present only when needed.

Georgia Legislative History

During the 2025–2026 biennium, the General Assembly left Georgia's ALPR law - which caps data retention at 30 months and limits use to law enforcement purposes - essentially unchanged.[11] After Savannah police employees were charged with misusing a license plate reader system, sheriffs and police chiefs formed a task force in August 2026 to consider new ALPR limits ahead of the 2027 session.[12]

Current and Future Regulations

A nationwide debate continues over how strictly ALPRs should be regulated. Companies like Flock have pledged to adopt new policies to ensure that police officers don't use Flock data for personal purposes.[13] However, local and state governments have considered either placing a wholesale ban on these cameras or passing regulations that ensure proper use and protect privacy.[14] Common middle-ground proposals include limiting how long scan data can be kept, requiring audit logs of every search an officer runs, and restricting data sharing with outside agencies.[15] In Georgia, State Senator Jaha Howard is drafting a bill for the 2027 session that would limit who can search ALPR databases, require more transparency about how the data is used, and create criminal penalties for misuse. Howard has framed the issue around "access and accountability," arguing that before officers run a search, "there should be an actual crime" and "a real investigation."[16]

Footnotes

1. Elec. Frontier Found., *Data Driven: What Is ALPR?*, EFF (Jan. 8, 2020), https://www.eff.org/pages/what-alpr.
2. *'Treated Like a Criminal': Witnesses Testify on Abuse of Flock Cameras*, Ctr. Square (Sept. 23, 2026), https://www.thecentersquare.com/national/article_61cd8485-ac89-44bc-ba24-7714cb73ee69.html.
3. *License Plate Readers*, Motorola Sols., https://www.motorolasolutions.com/en_us/video-security-access-control/license-plate-recognition-camera-systems.html (last visited Sept. 24, 2026).
4. Elec. Frontier Found., *supra* note 1.
5. *How an Automatic License Plate Recognition System Works*, Flock Safety (July 23, 2026), https://www.flocksafety.com/blog/how-an-automatic-license-plate-recognition-system-works.
6. *Id.*
7. Flock Safety, *supra* note 5.
8. *No Charges for Colorado Officers Who Held Black Children at Gunpoint*, NPR (Jan. 8, 2021), https://www.npr.org/2021/01/08/955165485/no-charges-for-colorado-officers-who-held-black-children-at-gunpoint.

9. *Police Officer Arrested After Using Flock to Track Ex-Girlfriend, Authorities Say*, CNN (Aug. 26, 2026), https://www.cnn.com/2026/08/26/us/flock-kentucky-police-officer-arrest.

10. Elec. Frontier Found., *supra* note 1.

11. Ga. Code Ann. § 35-1-22 (2025), https://law.justia.com/codes/georgia/title-35/chapter-1/section-35-1-22/.

12. Ty Tagami, *Key Lawmaker Explores Legislation to Curb Flock Camera Misuse*, The Current (Aug. 27, 2026), https://thecurrentga.org/2026/08/27/key-lawmaker-explores-legislation-to-curb-flock-camera-misuse/.

13. CNN, *supra* note 9.

14. *Map Shows Cities Rejecting Flock Cameras as Number Surges*, Newsweek (Sept. 2026), https://www.newsweek.com/map-shows-cities-rejecting-flock-cameras-as-number-surges-12408792.

15. Immigrant Legal Res. Ctr. & Am. C.L. Union, *Automated License Plate Readers*, https://www.ilrc.org/sites/default/files/resources/ilrc_aclu_alpr_for_organizers.pdf (last visited Sept. 24, 2026); *Clocking Flock: Amid Public Backlash, Flock Safety Releases Accountability Features Dependent on Customer Enforcement*, Sec. Mgmt. (Aug. 14, 2026), https://www.asisonline.org/security-management-magazine/latest-news/today-in-security/2026/august/Flock-Releases-Accountability-Features/.

16. *South Fulton Residents Debate Privacy, Oversight at Flock Town Hall*, FOX 5 Atlanta (Oct. 22, 2026), https://www.fox5atlanta.com/news/south-fulton-leaders-seek-tighter-rules-flock-camera-data; *South Fulton Hosting Flock Camera Town Hall Tonight with Mayor, State Senator and Privacy Experts*, CBS News Atlanta (Oct. 22, 2026), https://www.cbsnews.com/atlanta/news/south-fulton-hosting-flock-camera-town-hall-tonight-with-mayor-state-senator-and-privacy-experts/.