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For Immediate Release

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## **PredPol Software Purchase Canceled**

### *Predictive Policing Rejected As Oakland Privacy Commission Passes Surveillance Transparency Ordinance*

**Oakland**-Oakland's police department announced at the end of December that a planned purchase of \$150,000 of PredPol software, a predictive policing program based on algorithms that seek to predict when and where future crimes may occur, would not go forward.

Tim Birch, Head of Research and Planning at the Oakland Police Department, told Vice on December 28: "*Maybe we could reduce crime more by using predictive policing, but the unintended consequences [are] even more damaging... and it's just not worth it.*"

The use of predictive policing software to fight crime has an uncertain record, despite adoption by police departments in Los Angeles, Chicago and New York. The Bay Area has been an outlier with no use by the region's major cities. The Richmond, CA police department terminated their PredPol contract last year.

The software's forecasting computations can cause increased law enforcement resources to be directed at over-policed low-income neighborhoods and communities of color due to deep-seated bias that can be difficult to fully eliminate from human-programmed algorithms.

Disproportionate rates of law enforcement stops and use of force incidents have been widely documented to be associated with low-income neighborhoods with large Black and Latino populations. Birch agreed in the December 28th Vice article that Oakland's use of PredPol could lead to even more disproportionate stops of African Americans and Hispanics and further erode relations between communities and the police department.

In June of 2015, Oakland Privacy wrote of its concerns regarding PredPol software in a letter addressed to the Oakland City Council. After identifying several potential issues with the software, its effectiveness and deployment, we wrote:

We recommend that the City Council eliminate predictive policing software from the budget. We also strongly urge that should this item be considered at any time in the future, the City Council conduct a serious investigation into the effectiveness and civil liberties implications of this technology, and it must conduct a rigorous, open debate with public participation before deciding whether to move forward with this type of software. (The full letter can be read [here](#)).

Birch's decision comes as the City of Oakland's Privacy Advisory Commission, which was created in 2015 after the roll back of a planned city-wide surveillance dragnet called the Domain Awareness Center, unanimously passed a sweeping surveillance transparency ordinance.

The ordinance, which is expected to be approved by the Oakland City Council, will introduce a public approval policy for all purchases of surveillance and spying equipment with usage policies and annual audits for all new and existing equipment.

The chair of the city's privacy commission, Brian Hofer, commented :"*I feel confident that we have created a practical, transparent framework for public discussion about possible surveillance equipment procurement and appropriate use. In creating a public conversation, law enforcement will more clearly hear community concerns, and elected leaders can make better informed decisions.*"

The creation of the nation's first (and only) citizen's advisory commission on privacy in Oakland has played a vital role in increasing thoughtful analysis of the costs, benefits and liabilities of new technology, rather than the knee-jerk adoption of the latest new devices.

Had PredPol been recommended for use instead of rejected, the new ordinance would have required it come before the Privacy Commission for scrutiny, where problems with the software, its implementation and efficacy that were raised in Oakland Privacy's letter to the Council would have been considered.

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