

Madalyn Letellier

From: Ed Vogel [REDACTED]
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Subject: ShotSpotter
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Dear Honorable Members of Somerville City Council,

I am submitting this public comment for your 3/14 City Council meeting encouraging you to cancel your contract for the use of ShotSpotter.

Thank you for the consideration,

Ed Vogel
Member, Lucy Parsons Labs



Somerville City Council
93 Highland Ave.
Somerville, MA 02143
United States

March 13, 2024

Dear Honorable Members of Somerville City Council,

We write to you urgently requesting that the City of Somerville end its use of ShotSpotter. ShotSpotter is a profoundly harmful technology that exacerbates police violence while doing nothing to address the underlying structural and systemic causes of gun violence.

ShotSpotter is not a viable public safety technology because it inspires more violence. Several times, ShotSpotter played a direct role in a police officer using force against a resident. Silvon Simons,¹ Adam Toledo, and a recent near miss in Chicago when an officer shot at, but missed, a child playing with fireworks in January². In each instance, a ShotSpotter alert initiated a police deployment resulting in an officer firing their weapon and, in the case of Adam Toledo, resulting in Adam's murder³.

ShotSpotter's use leads to police violating the civil rights and liberties of residents. ShotSpotter acts as a "probable cause generator", as police use ShotSpotter-initiated deployments as justification for engaging anyone in proximity to the location of suspected gunfire. The Office of Inspector General in Chicago conducted a study of ShotSpotter deployments and found that police use ShotSpotter alerts in an area "to form the basis for an investigatory stop or as part of the rationale for a pat down once a stop has been initiated."⁴ The study concluded that police use "stop and frisk" tactics often in response to ShotSpotter deployments.

How ShotSpotter is used is alarming considering where it is deployed. A recent analysis published by Wired of where ShotSpotter microphones are installed across the country found, "nearly 70 percent of people who live in a neighborhood with at least one SoundThinking sensor identified in the ACS data as either Black or Latine."⁵ ShotSpotter *creates* violence and this violence is felt by Black and brown communities where the microphones are deployed – worsening the continued problems of racist policing.

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-police-rochester-shooting/>

² <https://jinxpress.org/no-its-just-fireworks-chicago-cop-opens-fire-on-child-with-fireworks-after-shotspotter-gunshot-alert/>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/16/us/adam-toledo-chicago-police-shooting.html>

⁴

<https://igchicago.org/2021/08/24/oig-finds-that-shotspotter-alerts-rarely-lead-to-evidence-of-a-gun-related-crime-and-that-presence-of-the-technology-changes-police-behavior/>

⁵ <https://www.wired.com/story/shotspotter-secret-sensor-locations-leak/>



While ShotSpotter exacerbates police violence, it has not proven to be an effective tool to address gun violence or save lives, despite the many promises from the company. In the largest study to date, researchers reviewed more than fifteen years of crime, calls for service, and police enforcement data in Kansas City and Chicago. The authors found that in Chicago, “ShotSpotter did not reduce the occurrence of shots-fired calls for service, fatal shootings, non-fatal shootings or other violent felonies committed with firearms”⁶ and in Kansas City, “ShotSpotter did not improve gun violence clearance rates there either”⁷. Another study in Chicago found that, “ShotSpotter implementation causes police officers to be dispatched one-minute slower (23% increase) and arrive on-scene nearly two-minutes later (13% increase)”⁸ meaning police arrived on the scene of incidents when someone was actually shot slower due to ShotSpotter, resulting in the loss of valuable time for saving lives.

Generally, ShotSpotter is a waste of public resources which could be directed towards meaningful programs which address the root causes of gun violence. The same study from the Office of Inspector General in Chicago found that more than 90% of ShotSpotter-initiated police deployments from January 1, 2020, and May 31, 2021 did not result in any evidence of a gun crime.⁹ The funds paying for the contract and for police to pursue thousands of dead-end deployments would be better spent on poverty-alleviating programs, improving access to quality housing, food, and jobs, and after-school programs for students, among other programs that can address the root causes of gun violence.

Just like you, we want to end gun violence. Simply put, ShotSpotter cannot and will never do that. This product has been a failed experiment across the country. We encourage you to follow the lead of San Diego, Seattle, Portland, Durham, New Orleans, Charlotte, Buffalo, Chicago, and Fall River, among other cities who chose not to use ShotSpotter. ShotSpotter is not an answer to gun violence and never will be. The residents of Somerville deserve their elected officials devoting public resources to programs that have demonstrated an ability to address gun violence in a way that addresses the systemic causes of it.

Sincerely,

Edward Vogel
Member, Lucy Parsons Labs

⁶ <https://www.vitalcitynyc.org/articles/learning-about-shot-spotter-from-chicago>

⁷ <https://www.vitalcitynyc.org/articles/learning-about-shot-spotter-from-chicago>

⁸ https://michaeltopper.netlify.app/research/jmp_michael_topper.pdf

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<https://igchicago.org/2021/08/24/oig-finds-that-shotspotter-alerts-rarely-lead-to-evidence-of-a-gun-related-crime-and-that-presence-of-the-technology-changes-police-behavior/>