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December 16, 2024

Dear Mayor Marlin, Members of the City Council Wu, Hursey, Kolisetty, Bishop, Evans, Quisenberry, and Wilken, and Police Chief Boone,

We, the American Civil Liberties Union of Champaign County, write to support passage of Ordinance No. 2024-12-042: An Ordinance Establishing Approval, Policy, and Reporting Requirements for Police Surveillance Technology. Our ACLU chapter is a community organization representing approximately twelve hundred households in Champaign County, a great many of whom live in Urbana. We work with ACLU Illinois to protect civil rights and civil liberties in Champaign County.

The ACLU maintains that legally enforceable safeguards, including robust transparency, oversight, and accountability measures must be in place to protect civil rights and civil liberties before any surveillance technology is deployed.

The decision regarding if and how police technologies should be funded, acquired, or used, and whether data from such technologies should be shared, should not be made until meaningful public input has been solicited and given significant weight. The ordinance under discussion ensures that Urbana residents will have that opportunity.

If a police technology is approved, data reporting measures must be adopted that empower the Council and public to verify that mandated civil rights and civil liberties safeguards have been strictly adhered to. This is critically important because while police technology may threaten the privacy of all of us, surveillance efforts have been used throughout history to intimidate and oppress certain communities and groups more than others, including those that are defined by a common race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, income level, sexual orientation, or political perspective.

Therefore, ACLU Champaign County strongly urges the Urbana City Council to pass this resolution.

Sincerely,

The Steering Committee of the ACLU of Champaign County, Carol Leff, President

Questions: Carol Spindel, Director of Communications cspindel7@gmail.com