



Stop LAPD Spying Coalition Wins Groundbreaking Public Records Lawsuit

The Stop LAPD Spying Coalition recently won a groundbreaking public records lawsuit against the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) demanding documents on the LAPD's LASER (Los Angeles Strategic Extraction and Restoration) and Chronic Offender program. The coalition filed the lawsuit in February 2018 and was represented by Attorneys Colleen Flynn and Matthew Strugar.

During the course of the lawsuit the Coalition forced the LAPD to provide hundreds of documents exposing the LAPD's violent targeting of individuals, communities, and entire neighborhoods, including the names of people they had placed in a secret database called Chronic Offender Bulletins to trace, track, and stalk people in the City of Los Angeles.

Background:

In 2009, LAPD started developing Operation LASER, part of LAPD's larger predictive policing program, claiming it was analogous to medical surgery, with the premise "to target with laser-like precision" community members LAPD designated as persons of interest in the way a "medical doctor uses modern technology to remove tumors." Dismantled in April of 2019 by grassroots efforts led by the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition, LAPD used LASER as both a person-based and place-based predictive policing strategy. LASER Zones were created as demarcated areas for extreme crime suppression, and people labeled as Chronic Offenders were targeted in these areas for tracking and surveillance. The Coalition was able to obtain 679 names from the database, though it is believed there are hundreds more.

In May of 2017 the Coalition filed a California Public Records request regarding Operation LASER demanding information about Chronic Offender Bulletins and other elements related to the LASER program including LASER Zones. The PRA sought to uncover such critical matters to the community as how people were selected as Chronic Offenders, which divisions were using LASER, and who was being targeted as a Chronic Offender, as well as how the program was funded, implemented, evaluated, and analyzed. Despite repeated attempts to communicate with LAPD regarding requested documents, LAPD remained unresponsive. In February 2018 the Coalition filed a Public Records lawsuit against the LAPD for violation of the California Public Records Act. Immediately after filing the lawsuit the LAPD released records to the Coalition, including grants, reports, maps, and studies all surrounding the development and operationalization of LASER. Through these documents, the Coalition was able to uncover not only where LASER Zones existed but also the location of micro-hotspots known as Anchor Points that became targeted by the Los Angeles City Attorney through the City-Wide Nuisance Abatement Program (CNAP) for eviction and displacement. It was discovered that LAPD was also creating mini fusion centers called Community Safety Operation Centers (CSOCs) located in all four bureaus using Palantir to aid in data collection, sharing, and analysis of

communities. It also revealed the LAPD's plans in using social network analysis to track and trace people associated to targeted chronic offenders as well as supplying officers with mobile tablets to track and trace targeted people in real time.

Only later did the LAPD release information on who had been designated a Chronic Offender. The community pressure, meanwhile, was mounting against LAPD. Shortly after filing the lawsuit the Coalition published the community-based report [Before the Bullet Hits the Body](#) on May 8, 2018. This report exposed the various predictive policing programs used by LAPD including a full analysis of the LASER program. Continued resistance, protests, and demands at the Board of Los Angeles Police Commissioners (BOPC) meetings regarding predictive policing forced the BOPC to hold a public hearing on LAPD Data-Driven Policing Programs including Operation LASER in July 2018.

Ultimately the hearing resulted in the Los Angeles BOPC ordering an audit of the LASER program, to be conducted by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG). The result of the audit was released on March 8, 2019. The Coalition conducted a review and analysis of the audit and published [The People's Response to the OIG Audit of Data-Driven Policing](#) to illuminate and call out shortcomings of the OIG's review and to reassert community demands. Though purely a procedural audit, the OIG did uncover blatant violations in regard to the creation and placement of people in the Chronic Offender secret database. The OIG found:

- LAPD was designating community members "Chronic Offenders" based on informal referrals from field personnel;
- LAPD advised officers to stop "Chronic Offenders" even if the person wasn't suspected of committing any crime;
- LAPD was storing Chronic Offenders Bulletins inconsistently; and,
- LAPD had no retention policy for Chronic Offender lists or bulletins;

The OIG audit, however, never raised any concerns regarding the violation of human and civil rights of Angelenos. The OIG failed to comprehensively review each component of the LASER program and its grave impact on communities.

The work of the Coalition is significant as the Los Angeles Police Commission is fundamentally a rubber stamp body that only exists to provide LAPD the veneer of civilian oversight. During the review of the audit in March, April and October the BOPC never once raised concerns regarding the extensive impact of LASER on the community. There was no call to contact people on the list nor uncover if community members were evicted or displaced through the CNAP program. The BOPC has never required the LAPD to purge all data gathered as a result of this defunct program. The most devastating component of these findings was the fact that LAPD killings of community members occurred in or near LASER Zones. The victims include Jesse Romero, Richard Richer, Kenny Watkins, Keith Bursey, Daniel Perez, Grechario Mack, and Robert Diaz.

It is the intent of the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition to bring to light the negative impacts the LAPD's LASER and Chronic Offender programs have had on our community and its members. Through the release of these documents through the CPRA, the Coalition will be able to reach out to those the LAPD labeled "Chronic Offenders," uncover how the program affected them, and fight for reparations. We will not stand for abuse and intentional violence by law enforcement without a fight.
