

On the condition that the technology has no biases and is proven to have low error rates, then I think that the Seattle City Council should authorize very limited use of facial recognition software on SPD body cameras. By “very limited”, I mean that the use of this technology should require a warrant, and that it should only be used when the police are searching for a particular wanted criminal that they have a photo of. The software should only be able to tell the wearer whether someone matches the photo of the criminal. It should not be able to identify people who are not a match to the photo.

If the technology were able to identify anyone who came into the camera’s view—similar to how Clearview is able to identify anyone—the police officer wearing the camera would be able to access certain information about everyone they came into contact with, including whether they have a criminal record. This would only exacerbate the police department’s abuses of power. The knowledge that a person has a criminal record would cause the police to view them with greater suspicion. This could combine with the police officer’s implicit biases to form “reasonable suspicion”, even if the person was not doing anything particularly suspicious. When considering the fact that black people are more likely to have a criminal record due to bias in the criminal justice system, I worry that facial recognition technology used in this way would lead to further over-policing of and violence against black communities. In addition, numerous BLM protesters have been tracked down through facial recognition technology. Allowing unregulated facial recognition software on body cameras would only increase incidents such as these, crippling movements that combat police brutality.