

October 23, 2026

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

We read with interest Bridge Turner's October 22nd on-line story about the Thomaston Police Department officer who repeatedly (400 times) abused the City's Flock mass surveillance camera system to track personal acquaintances with no legitimate law enforcement purpose. We applaud TPD Chief Mike Richardson's apparent prompt firing of this officer, his referral of the matter to the GBI for criminal investigation, and the implementation of written protocols to better regulate the use of the Flock camera system.

But the story raises more questions than it answers. Why hasn't the Chief released the name of the offending officer? Is he trying to protect this person? Who was it? Would the Chief have learned of this criminal activity had he not received an email from the Washington Post raising concerns? Will the chief release a copy of that email? Would the story have become public but for the Beacon's inquisitive Mr. Turner? Why weren't written safeguards in place to begin with? Was anyone at the TPD monitoring the system?

Your story underscores the urgent need for the very measures the Azalea Privacy Alliance has repeatedly advocated including:

(1) the appointment of an **independent** ombudsman, a **gatekeeper not employed by law enforcement**, to decide when access to the

Flock camera database should be granted and conduct regular audits of the system to detect and prevent abuse.

(2) **improved record keeping**,

(3) **greater public access to those records**,

(4) **mandatory reporting requirements** for abuses of the system, and

(5) **prominent signage** to alert citizens of the location of Flock cameras.

These measures should be implemented by both of our local governmental legislative bodies as soon as possible. Federal civil rights lawsuits against local governments over the use of these camera systems have already been filed in several states including Georgia. The measures we advocate will better ensure our mass surveillance camera systems are operated in a constitutional, open, and transparent manner, prevent future abuses of the system, and provide accountability for any government officer who attempts to abuse the system.

Respectfully submitted,

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