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September 11, 2026

Upson County Board of Commissioners
c/o Lonnie Joyce, County Manager
(*ljoyce@upsoncountyga.org*)
Jessica Jones, County Clerk
(*jjones@upsoncountyga.org*)
106 E Lee Street
Suite 110
Thomaston, GA 30286

Mayor and Council of the City of Thomaston
c/o Russell Thompson, City Manager
(*rthompson@cityofthomaston.com*)
Taylor White, City Clerk
(*twhite@cityofthomaston.com*)
106 East Lee Street
Thomaston, GA 30286

Re: Use and Regulation of Public Surveillance Technology
in Thomaston and Upson County

Gentlemen,

As you are aware, there has been much heated public debate over the use of government surveillance technology in this country. This primarily involves the use of cameras positioned on public streets which employ AI-powered Automated License Plate Readers (ALPRs). These cameras capture vehicle make, model, color, license plate, bumper stickers, and timestamps of all vehicles which pass before them. Collected data enters a searchable, centralized network accessible to law enforcement agencies across the country. Supporters and police departments state the technology helps locate stolen vehicles, track fleeing suspects, and find missing persons. Some police agencies credit the system with solving a major share of violent crimes and homicides in their jurisdictions.

On the other hand, critics, including the American Civil Liberties Union, argue that continuous tracking violates privacy and constitutes mass surveillance without a

warrant. They wonder what legitimate governmental interest exists in tracking the movements of the general public. They argue it is not the business of the government to track and record law-abiding citizens' visits to their churches, doctors, stores, or friends.

Audits (such as one by the Los Angeles Police Department) have revealed high error rates in correctly identifying stolen vehicles, leading to wrongful stops of innocent citizens at gunpoint.

Scores of law enforcement officers nationwide have been accused or convicted of misusing the database to illegally track romantic partners, family members, and acquaintances. Some of those offenders have been in Georgia.

The leading company in the public surveillance industry is Flock Group Inc., doing business as Flock Safety ("Flock"). The company is located in Atlanta. Flock operates its system under contract with law enforcement agencies, neighborhood associations, and private property owners. As of July 2026, Flock says that it operates in over 6,000 communities across 49 US states, and performs over 20 billion scans of vehicles in the US every month. (This information is from Wikipedia.)

Both Thomaston and Upson County have contracted with Flock to install its system here.

In his remarks to the Thomaston Downtown Development Authority in June of this year Thomaston Police Chief Mike Richardson stated Thomaston currently has 12 Flock Tag Readers and proposes to install 5 more. According to Flock's Mason Mischler, who also attended the meeting, the city is currently paying Flock \$30,000.00 a year for those 12 cameras. The additional cost for the new 5 cameras will be \$20,000.00 per year. See "DDA Hears Pitch for New FLOCK Cameras" by Andrew Carroll, Upson Beacon, June 17, 2026.

The Upson County Sheriff's Department operated 12 Flock cameras as of September, 2025. See [https:// www.atlasofsurveillance.org/a/GA1450000ALPR](https://www.atlasofsurveillance.org/a/GA1450000ALPR) (last visited 9/11/26). There may be more now. The system was initially approved by the Upson County Board of Commissioners in 2022 for an initial two-year contract of \$64,200 for installation of the cameras, followed by a recurring annual cost of \$30,000 for maintenance and replacement, if necessary. See "Commission OKs Flock Cameras for County Roadways", by Bridge Turner, Upson Beacon, Sept. 21, 2022.

Last month Garrett Langley, Flock's CEO, apologized for instances where its data was misused by law enforcement officers and discussed changes the company is rolling out to its systems. Those changes include:

1. Reducing the period of time data will be retained from 30 days to seven days. (However, if data is tied to an investigation that needs more time, it

can be preserved in a setting it calls "Evidence Mode.")

2. Every search of its data will now require a case code to be entered beforehand. (But that can be overridden.)
3. Flock's customers can also limit which types of offenses outside agencies can search for in its system, like homicide, arson or assault.

Langley acknowledged "when you are given power, which many people are, particularly in law enforcement, you should have higher standards of accountability," See "Flock CEO apologizes for cases where surveillance technology was abused as company rolls out changes", By Alex Sundby and Anna Schechter, August 14, 2026, CBS News

In his remarks to the Upson County Board of Commissioners at its September 8, 2026 meeting, county manager Lonnie Joyce advised the Board that he had looked into the controversy involving the abuse of the Flock system. He reported that he had spoken to the Sheriff and learned that the sheriff had implemented Flock's new changes to the county's Flock system and was on top of the situation to ensure "nobody is going to be doing any surveillance that they are not supposed to do." According to Joyce there is no need to worry because "everything is fine".

Mr. Joyce's apparent belief based on his superficial investigation that the county commission need not concern itself with taking steps to better manage access to the Flock data system and that law enforcement may be trusted to police itself is profoundly troubling. No matter how well intentioned the Sheriff and the Chief of Police both have inherent institutional biases and conflicts of interest. Each heads an agency seeking access to the Flock data. Neither can be truly considered a neutral arbiter of which requests for access should be granted.

I urge the Upson Board of Commissioners and the Mayor and Council of the City of Thomaston to consider implementing the following measures in the administration of the Flock camera system:

1. **Independent Ombudsman.** A neutral and independent Flock "ombudsman" shall be appointed to issue case codes and decide requests for access to the Flock data base. No person may access the Flock database without a case code issued by the ombudsman. The ombudsman shall not issue a case code unless reasonable cause has been demonstrated. The ombudsman may limit the scope of any access granted based on the time and place of the data sought to be reviewed. The ombudsman shall be authorized to conduct random audits of the system to ensure compliance.

2. **Records.** The ombudsman shall maintain a written log and record of every request for access and every action taken by the ombudsman. Requests and decisions shall be in writing and available for public inspection unless the matter concerns an ongoing investigation in which no arrest has yet been made. Requests and decisions may be made by email but hard copies must be maintained.
3. **Ombudsman's Qualifications.** The ombudsman shall be familiar with surveillance technology and well versed in legal concepts like "probable cause", "reasonable and articulable suspicion" and "reasonable cause." **The ombudsman shall not be employed by either the sheriff's department or the police department.** The ombudsman shall be on call 24/7 and available by telephone and email.
4. **Prosecutions for Abuse of system.** The ombudsman shall be empowered to refer to the District Attorney any case in which it appears false or misleading information has been provided to the ombudsman to obtain improper access to the system.
5. **Ombudsman's Fees.** The ombudsman shall be paid a base salary shared equally by the county, the city, and Flock Safety. In addition, the ombudsman shall be paid a fee for each request he or she processes which shall be paid by the agency making the request. This will discourage frivolous requests.
6. **Signage.** Each Flock camera shall be marked by prominent signage notifying the public of the location and purpose of the camera. This will allow citizens to avoid being surveilled or at least make them aware of the camera and its function.

Implementation of these safe guards will better ensure our local Flock camera system is operated in an open and transparent manner, prevent future abuses of the system, and provide accountability for any law enforcement officer who attempts to abuse the system.

I request that I be allowed to appear and speak at the next regular scheduled meetings of the Board of Commissions and the Mayor and Council to address this proposal.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,



MARY ALICE ADAMS

cc: The Upson Beacon
WTGA Radio Station