



# DRONE-FREE LAPD NO DRONES, LA!

October 21, 2014

Mayor Eric Garcetti  
City of Los Angeles  
200 N. Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Mayor Eric Garcetti:

On behalf of the Drone-Free LAPD/No Drones, LA! Campaign, we write to share our deep concerns about the failure of your office and staff to meaningfully respond to the community's repeated request to meet with you. A very clear message from you, however, was sent to the community through your endorsement of AB 1327 in addition to allowing the transfer of drones to Los Angeles Police Department's (LAPD) Inspector General Alex Bustamante, and conceding control of community outreach to LAPD -- *the Mayor of Los Angeles City does not value meaningful community input.*

We are writing again to share our rejection of drone usage by LAPD and request an in person meeting with you as well as expose the clear conflict of interest that exists by allowing LAPD to engage and control community outreach regarding this issue. The Drone-Free LAPD/No Drones, LA! Campaign was initiated by a cross section of concerned individuals, including human and civil rights, and privacy rights organizations, faith based and community based organizations in response to the "gifting" of two Draganflyer X6 Drones by the Seattle Police Department (SPD) to LAPD in May, 2014.<sup>1</sup> We believe the acquisition of drones signify a giant step forward in the militarization of local law enforcement that is normalizing continued surveillance of our communities.

On August 12, 2014 the campaign wrote a letter to you requesting an urgent meeting to discuss the impact of Drone technology on Angelenos.<sup>2</sup> Our requests were repeatedly sidelined by your office. We were told that you were busy and a meeting with the Deputy Mayor for Homeland Security will be scheduled. Then we were told that the Deputy Mayor was busy as well.

On August 21<sup>st</sup> we held a press conference announcing the launch of the Drone Free LAPD/ No Drones, LA! Campaign.<sup>3</sup> Shortly after the press conference a campaign delegation attempted to enter City Hall to schedule a meeting with you. The delegation was refused entry into City Hall.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.laweekly.com/2014-06-19/news/game-of-drones-how-lapd-quietly-acquired-the-spy-birds-shunned-by-seattle>

<sup>2</sup> <http://stoplapdspying.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Letter-to-Mayor-Eric-Garcetti-re-LAPD-Drones.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-anti-drone-campaign-lapd-city-hall-20140821-story.html>

This was a violation of our civil rights. Vocalizing this obvious point to the law enforcement officer at city hall entrance caused a response from your office and your communication staff Yusef Robb met with our delegation at the City Hall steps committing to get back to us regarding our request for an in person meeting with you. We never heard back from him.

A meeting time was then scheduled with your Homeland Security and Public Safety Policy Directors Thalia Polychronis and Neeraj Bhatnagar on August 29<sup>th</sup>. At this meeting five Drone-Free LAPD/No Drones, LA! campaign representatives shared concerns about the use of drones by LAPD in extensive detail and made the simple request to meet with you directly. Both Policy Directors assured us that a report would be written and submitted to you regarding our concerns and a follow up email would be sent to us within two weeks to schedule a meeting with you. That two week deadline fell on September 12<sup>th</sup>-- the day you publicly endorsed AB 1327 that authorized the use of drones by law enforcement in California. On September 15<sup>th</sup>, the Los Angeles Police Commission issued a media release stating "on Friday September 12 late afternoon" the drones "were transferred to the care and custody of the Office of the Inspector General where they will remain until the LAPD presents to the Commission draft policies and procedures which reflect public input." To add insult to injury, the media release further stated that "LAPD has begun their community outreach and process for drafting of policies and protocols for consideration by the Commission."

The People of Los Angeles find this to be a gross violation of public trust and reject this biased and tainted process. Not only are you, Mayor Garcetti, reneging on your stated promise of seeking public input on the use of drones by LAPD, the Los Angeles Police Commission has taken it a step further by taking possession of the Drones and now "await LAPD drafting policies and protocol for the commission's approval." **In essence the use of drones by LAPD is a foregone conclusion. Institutionally LAPD has control of the drones albeit "under the Inspector General's control" and community input is now controlled by LAPD itself.**

LAPD has a long history of lies, brutality, and violence against our communities. We demand that LAPD not be allowed to add drone technology to its expansive arsenal of weapons and surveillance equipment. As an untrustworthy and unaccountable institution, we believe that there is no policy capable of protecting our human and civil rights.

Just this year - 2014, LAPD is already mired in several scandals affirming the extreme distrust of LAPD by the people of Los Angeles. From LAPD officers sabotaging 90 out of 300 LAPD squad cars by tampering antennas that feed video and voice monitoring equipment,<sup>4</sup> to misclassification of crime reports,<sup>5</sup> to the IG's report on "ghost cars,"<sup>6</sup> to "donations" to the Police Foundation by the same corporations who in return get millions of dollars of contracts for supplying surveillance equipment to LAPD,<sup>7</sup> are just a few examples of LAPD corruption and incompetence, including flagrant violation of a federal consent decree. It is becoming increasingly clear to Angelenos that it is not a case of one bad apple, the whole institution is inherently corrupt and untrustworthy.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.scpr.org/news/2014/04/15/43524/la-police-commission-grills-lapd-over-officers-who>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-crimestats-lapd-20140810-story.html#page=1>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.scpr.org/news/2014/10/14/47394/lapd-watchdogs-warn-ghost-cars-may-indicate-deeper>

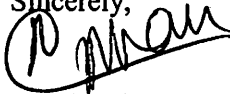
<sup>7</sup> <http://www.propublica.org/article/private-donors-supply-spy-gear-to-cops>

We also expect LAPD will broaden its usage of drones within the context of “mission creep.” Mission creep alludes to the application of a specific tactic expanded beyond the original stated scope towards new and enlarged purposes. As stated in the June 2014 report from American Civil Liberties Union, “The War Comes Home: The Excessive Militarization of American Policing,”<sup>8</sup> Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams were often deployed—unnecessarily and aggressively—to execute search warrants in low-level drug investigations; deployments for hostage or barricade scenarios occurred in only a small number of incidents. A majority of SWAT deployments were for the purpose of executing a search warrant, most commonly in drug investigations. Only a small handful of deployments were for hostage, barricade, or active shooter scenarios.

Furthermore, the Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) program – originally intended for counter terrorism, now is LAPD’s insidious tool for everyday policing. The SAR program has resulted in the opening of thousands of secret files on people engaging in perfectly innocent behavior. Adding drone surveillance technology to the arsenal of surveillance equipment, already in operation by LAPD, will exacerbate the blatant violation of privacy rights of Angelenos.<sup>9</sup>

Lastly and most importantly, the Los Angeles Police Department is one the most militarized police departments in the world using massive amount of tactical weapons, and human and electronic surveillance technology. Tanks, helicopters, armored vehicles, assault guns, stun grenades, tear gas, rubber bullets, tasers, trapwire, stingray, high definition cameras, automatic license plate readers, suspicious activity reporting programs, intelligence gathering guidelines, joint terrorism task force, fusion center and now Drones -- signify the structural and operational formation of LAPD as an occupying force that operates as a counterinsurgency agency rather than the much touted “community policing” model. Drone surveillance equipment in the hands of LAPD will continue to profile the people of Los Angeles, create a culture of fear and suspicion, invade our privacy, and criminalize innocent behavior.

The Drone-Free LAPD/No Drones, LA! Campaign is again requesting a meeting to discuss this very important issue. Please contact us by email at [stoplapdspying@gmail.com](mailto:stoplapdspying@gmail.com) or call Hamid Khan at (562) 230-4578. We look to your leadership and support in prohibiting the use of drone technology by the LAPD.

Sincerely,  


Hamid Khan  
Drone-Free LAPD/No Drones, LA! Campaign

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.aclu.org/war-comes-home-excessive-militarization-american-policing>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.laweekly.com/2014-02-27/news/forget-the-nsa-la-cops-spy-on-millions-of-innocent-folks>