

FLOCK FAVORS:

Police Across New York Search Flock on Behalf of ICE

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Executive Summary

- State and local police in New York have searched Flock’s license plate database on behalf of ICE, entering reasons like “Immigration (civil/administrative)” for drivers suspected of no crime.
- Officers appear to have concealed some—possibly many—immigration searches by providing vague or nonexistent reasons for their searches.
- New York’s Local Cops, Local Crimes Act, enacted as part of this year’s budget bill, bans formal and informal cooperation with ICE starting August 25.
- The NYS Attorney General’s new Office of Immigrant Trust is tasked with enforcing the ban, but can only hold officers accountable for searches it can see. New York State must require police to document their license plate reader searches.
- S.T.O.P. and LatinoJustice PRLDEF also call for statewide limits on law enforcement use of license plate reader tracking; a 48-hour limit on license plate reader data retention; and data-sharing restrictions.

I. New York Police Departments Search Flock for ICE, and Some Appear to Conceal Immigration Searches

Flock Safety photographs every vehicle that passes one of its roadside cameras, turning each scan into another record in its searchable database of where vehicles go and when.¹ The Atlanta-based company has grown fast in under a decade: it now captures 20 billion scans a month with more than 120,000 cameras in over 6,000 communities across 49 states.² Flock markets this surveillance network to law enforcement clients, who can search the Flock records of any participating jurisdiction—and at times, the records of communities that never agreed to share them.³

¹ “Get The Flock Out,” American Civil Liberties Union, updated August 20, 2026, <https://www.aclu.org/campaigns-initiatives/get-the-flock-out>.

² Drew Harwell et al., “How Rogue Officers Turned a Nationwide Camera Network into a Tool for Stalking,” *The Washington Post*, August 2, 2026, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2026/08/02/how-police-officers-used-vast-network-cameras-spy-their-exes/>.

³ Gideon Epstein, “Flock Gives Law Enforcement All Over the Country Access to Your Location,” ACLU of Massachusetts, *The Data for Justice Project*, October 7, 2025, <https://data.aclum.org/2025/10/07/flock-gives-law-enforcement-all-over-the-country-access-to-your-location/>. See also Jay Stanley, “Flock Can Share Driver-Surveillance Data Even When Police Departments Opt Out, And Other Flock Developments,” *American Civil Liberties Union*, October 24, 2025, <https://www.aclu.org/news/privacy-technology/tracking-alpr-cameras/flock-massachusetts-and-updates>.

New Yorkers have turned against Flock.⁴ A year ago, Syracuse residents discovered that Flock let police search their driver data thousands of times on behalf of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which lacks direct access to Flock's records.⁵ Since then, New Yorkers everywhere have mobilized against the company, petitioning their town and city councils to dump Flock and even smashing, crashing into, and throwing paint on Flock installations.⁶

Syracuse residents rejected Flock because the company allowed police across the country to search their driver data on behalf of ICE. But the problem is closer to home than that.

Our own police run these searches. S.T.O.P. and LatinoJustice PRLDEF reviewed Flock search logs obtained by the website Have I Been Flocked? using open records requests.⁷ The logs offer an incomplete, redacted snapshot of law enforcement's Flock searches. Even so, the records show that as recently as July 2026:

- Nassau County, NY police ran plates to find drivers not suspected of any crime (stated reason for search: "Immigration (civil/administrative)").⁸
- Beacon, NY police searched Flock for ICE (reason: "civil/administrative immigration").⁹
- Glen Cove, NY police searched Flock for ICE (reason: "ICE").¹⁰
- Cheektowaga, NY police searched Flock for ICE (reason: "Wanted by ICE").¹¹

These searches, in which officers admit that they are colluding with ICE, are the tip of the iceberg. Other ICE searches hide beneath the surface. Officers have been able to enter any reason (or no reason at all) to justify a Flock search. And some officers appear to have done exactly this to obscure

⁴ Daniel Schwarz and Marie Holmes, "How License Plate Readers Track Your Every Move," NYCLU ACLU of New York, May 20, 2026, <https://www.nyclu.org/commentary/how-license-plate-readers-track-your-every-move>.

⁵ Patrick McCarthy, "Syracuse Police Exposed Driver Data to Cops around the Country," *Central Current*, July 4, 2025, <https://centralcurrent.org/syracuse-police-exposed-driver-data-to-thousands-of-cops-around-the-country/>.

⁶ See, for example, Rob Petree, "Cheektowaga Community Reacts after Flock Camera Vandalized," *News 4 Buffalo*, August 13, 2026, <https://www.wivb.com/news/local-news/erie-county/cheektowaga/cheektowaga-community-reacts-after-flock-camera-vandalized/>. See also Brendan Carpenter, "Greenport Flock Camera Vandalized for Second Time in Two Months," *The Suffolk Times*, August 12, 2026, <https://suffolktimes.timesreview.com/2026/08/greenport-flock-camera-vandalized-for-second-time-in-two-months/>. See also Annie Gowen, "Americans Are Destroying License-Plate Cameras as Surveillance Backlash Grows," *The Washington Post*, August 18, 2026, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2026/08/18/vandals-are-destroying-license-plate-cameras-amid-anger-over-surveillance/>.

⁷ "Have I Been Flocked? Search Flock ALPR Audit Logs," <https://haveibeenflocked.com>, accessed August 18, 2026.

⁸ We drew all Flock data from the Have I Been Flocked? website. "Immigration Report," Have I Been Flocked?, accessed August 18, 2026, https://haveibeenflocked.com/immigration-records?state=NY&sort=date_desc.

⁹ The Beacon Flock user also noted "stolen vehicle." It's unclear whether officers hoped to deport an offender rather than investigate them, or whether the immigrant in question was the victim of a crime. See "Immigration Report," Have I Been Flocked?, accessed August 18, 2026.

¹⁰ "Immigration Report," Have I Been Flocked?, accessed August 18, 2026.

¹¹ "Immigration Report," Have I Been Flocked?, accessed August 18, 2026.

the fact that they are searching on behalf of ICE, just as officers nationwide have hidden the fact that they use Flock to spy on ex-partners and colleagues.¹²

By linking multiple searches for the same license plate, we identified the following seemingly concealed immigration searches:

- On March 24, 2025, the NYS Fusion Center (a hub where federal, state, and local law enforcement share information) searched a plate with reason “SWB 25-03-01 DHS Agent,” apparently referring to the southwest border, a date, and a Department of Homeland Security employee. When a NYS police officer searched the same plate an hour later, their stated reason was “Investigation.”¹³ Executive Order 170 bars state police from investigating immigration status unless required by law.¹⁴ By writing “investigation” but not specifying what kind, the officer appears to have concealed the fact that they were engaging in improper and illegal use of the data.
- On June 1, 2025, a Border Patrol agent ran a plate. When a Lancaster, NY officer searched the same plate that day and two days later, they gave only “inv” [investigation] as a reason. A week later, a Cheektowaga officer searched the plate twice, first giving the reason “WANTED,” then “Wanted by ICE.”¹⁵

Because officers often barely document their Flock searches, there is no way to know how many NYS police departments are helping ICE locate drivers. In the records we reviewed, officers left the reason field vague or blank in many searches. Police departments also redact records heavily before publication, frequently cutting the reason and the plate identifier, which links different searches of the same vehicle.

The cases we found, in which officers freely disclosed immigration-related searches or searched for a license plate that another user had just searched for ICE, are likely only a fraction of the instances where police collude with ICE.

II. NYS Law Does Not Allow Informal Agreements with ICE

New York’s Local Cops, Local Crimes Act became law as part of this year’s budget bill.¹⁶ Police may insist that the new law allows them to conduct car-tracking searches for ICE. It does not.

¹² Jason Koebler, “Cops Keep Getting Arrested for Using Flock to Stalk People,” *404 Media*, June 10, 2026, <https://www.404media.co/cops-keep-getting-arrested-for-using-flock-to-stalk-people/>.

¹³ Have I Been Flocked?, accessed August 18, 2026, <https://havebeenflocked.com/?l=c3bc4c9f> (press search to get results).

¹⁴ N.Y. EXEC. ORDER NO. 170 (SEP. 15, 2017).

¹⁵ Have I Been Flocked?, accessed August 18, 2026, <https://havebeenflocked.com/?l=71cf4729> (press search to get results).

¹⁶ S.B. S9005C, 2025–2026 LEGIS. SESS. (N.Y. 2026). For resource restriction.

The law bars state and municipal employees from using public resources for immigration enforcement, but excludes law enforcement officers from the expenditure ban. The law enforcement loophole was meant to allow local police to cooperate with immigration authorities when they arrest people for serious criminal violations who may be subject to deportation. But in practice, local police are conducting routine searches on Flock for people who are not suspected of any crime. While this may not violate the resource-sharing ban, it represents an informal agreement with ICE and is therefore still against the law.

As of August 25, 2026, the new law voids 287(g) agreements, under which local law enforcement agencies pledge their willingness to assist ICE with civil immigration matters.¹⁷ Of all the police departments that clearly performed ICE searches, only Nassau County signed one.¹⁸ Beacon, Cheektowaga, Glen Cove, Lancaster, and New York State police helped (or appear to have helped) ICE without 287(g) agreements, so a ban on formal agreements leaves them free to keep searching.

But New York's new law includes one more word that does prohibit local law enforcement from conducting routine searches on Flock at the request of ICE: in banning 287(g) agreements, it bars "any formal or **informal** agreement under which an officer or employee may engage in or assist immigration enforcement" (emphasis added).¹⁹ Departments that allow officers to run routine Flock searches for people not suspected of any criminal violation, based solely on a request from ICE, violate the ban on informal cooperation.

Needed Policy Changes

To ensure that the new state Office of Immigrant Trust, established within the Attorney General's office as part of the new law, can properly enforce the ban on informal cooperation with ICE, it will need more information. In particular, New York needs:

- (1) A policy requiring law enforcement to document and make available to the Attorney General's office every search of a license plate reader database, including who conducted the search, specific and detailed reasons for the search, and a case number.²⁰ A log that says

¹⁷ N.Y. EXEC. LAW § 170 K (McKINNEY 2026). For August 25 ban.

¹⁸ "LAWSUIT: NY Orgs File First Suit in New York Over Unlawful Deputization of Local Officers As ICE Agents in Nassau County," NYCLU ACLU of New York, June 24, 2025, <https://www.nyclu.org/press-release/lawsuit-ny-orgs-file-first-suit-in-new-york-over-unlawful-deputization-of-local-officers-as-ice-agents-in-nassau-county>.

¹⁹ N.Y. EXEC. LAW § 170 K (McKINNEY 2026).

²⁰ Flock recently announced changes that would require better search logs, but it's just one vendor among many license plate reader companies. All must be regulated. See Drew Harwell et al., "Flock Unveils Changes after Post Report on Police Misuse of Vast Camera Network," *The Washington Post*, August 13, 2026, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2026/08/13/flock-unveils-changes-after-post-report-police-misuse-its-network/>. See also Cate Collins, "Months after Syracuse Ditched Flock, Critics Say Switch to Axon Solved Nothing," *CNY Central*, July 24, 2026, <https://cnycentral.com/news/local/months-after-syracuse-ditched-flock-critics-say-switch-to-axon-solved-nothing>. See also Joseph Cox, "Cities Are Ditching Flock, Immediately Replacing It With Axon License Plate Readers," *404 Media*, August 6, 2026, <https://www.404media.co/cities-are-ditching-flock-immediately-replacing-it-with-axon-license-plate-readers/>.

“inv” and leaves it at that does not provide enough information to determine that the search was legal.

Requiring documentation can expose and discourage unlawful Flock searches. To *stop* abuses of car-tracking data—which, in addition to unlawful immigration searches, include the tracking of abortion-seekers, protesters, and officers’ ex-partners—additional limits are needed.²¹ S.T.O.P. and LatinoJustice PRLDEF recommend the following restrictions on police use of license plate readers, adapted from Assembly Bill A10808/Senate Bill S9890, introduced in New York State’s 2025-2026 legislative session:²²

- (2) A statewide policy limiting license plate reader searches to investigating felony crimes, locating stolen vehicles, and finding people reported missing.
- (3) A statewide policy limiting the retention of license plate reader data. Flock recently announced a 7-day default—that’s too long.²³ We recommend a 48-hour retention policy with exceptions for data retained for evidence or by warrant.
- (4) A statewide policy prohibiting New York law enforcement agencies from engaging in any data sharing with federal immigration enforcement authorities, except in connection with a felony criminal investigation.

The state law prohibiting local law enforcement collaboration with federal immigration agencies needs clarification and help. The resource ban seems to exempt police, while the formal 287(g) ban applies to only one of the departments we found conducting immigration-related searches. That leaves the ban on informal cooperation with ICE, which the Attorney General’s new Office of Immigrant Trust can enforce only on immigration searches it can *see*.

Our proposed measures would make all car-tracking searches legible to the Attorney General, to defense attorneys, to journalists, and to others who request public records. They would also scale back immigration-related searches and other investigations that New Yorkers don’t stand for in the first place.

²¹ Joseph Cox, “A Texas Cop Searched License Plate Cameras Nationwide for a Woman Who Got an Abortion,” 404 Media, May 29, 2025, <https://www.404media.co/a-texas-cop-searched-license-plate-cameras-nationwide-for-a-woman-who-got-an-abortion/>. See also Dave Maass and Rindala Alajaji, “How Cops Are Using Flock Safety’s ALPR Network to Surveil Protesters and Activists,” Electronic Frontier Foundation, November 20, 2025, <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2025/11/how-cops-are-using-flock-safetys-alpr-network-surveil-protesters-and-activists>. See also Jason Koebler, “Cops Keep Getting Arrested.”

²² ASSEMB. B. A10808, 2025–2026 LEGIS. SESS. (N.Y. 2026).

²³ Garrett Langley, “Flock Updates Privacy, Accountability, Security, and Transparency Safeguards,” *Flock*, August 13, 2026, <https://www.flocksafety.com/blog/flock-guardrails-address-lpr-privacy-concerns-and-police-transparency>.



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