March 20, 2019

Dear Elected Official,

      The Coalition on Homelessness is writing to request that you support Supervisor Aaron Peskin's "Stop Secret Surveillance" Ordinance that would require San Francisco City Departments to adopt a Surveillance Data Policy if they intend to use, continue to use, or acquire surveillance technology equipment. The legislation would also require any agency wishing to use such technology to get approval from the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, as well as provide an annual audit of such technology use. Finally, the legislation categorically prohibits the use of any Facial Recognition Technology by any San Francisco city departments.

      This legislation is urgently needed given the slew of new surveillance technologies now available and the dearth of regulation on the topic. This legislation would be one of the first in the nation to ban Facial Recognition Technology and would join San Francisco with Santa Clara and a few other California counties in regulating surveillance technology.

      Story after story in the media show the ways in which such technologies have either deliberately or inadvertently targeted people of color, violated the citizenry's civil liberties, and laid the groundwork for a truly Orwellian society where people's every move is monitored and potentially criminalized.

      While arguments can, and have, been made about the benefits of surveillance technology to protect public safety, we strongly believe such technologies need to be regulated, and in the case of Facial Recognition technology, prohibited. There is no place in the City and County of San Francisco for the use of such technology. In its current iteration the technology is inaccurate and tends to single out communities of color. But even were the technology "accurate" and did not directly target people of color, the very nature of the technology tends to focus on the poorest and most disenfranchised communities in the city given the current social and economic structure of American society.   For example, shelter residents since 2004 have been required to submit to biometric imaging of their face in order to qualify for 90 day shelter beds. This practice immediately led to many undocumented residents becoming fearful of the use of this technology to find and deport them, and the shelters saw a decrease in use by undocumented individuals.

      For this reason, we support a complete ban of the use of Facial Recognition Technology in San Francisco. Given the march of technology there will doubtless be attempts to introduce Facial Recognition Technology. (This piece of legislation deals with that eventuality by creating a stringent

process that any attempt to introduce Facial Recognition Technology will have to navigate.)

      We appreciate your interest in this important privacy and civil liberties matter. We feel confident you would be willing to help get such legislation passed.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Friedenbach
Executive Director