

# TRUST Act

City Council, led by Council members Chito Vela and Mike Seigel, passed the Transparent and Responsible Use of Surveillance Technology (TRUST) Act on April 23, 2026. The creation of the TRUST Act stemmed from concerns about citizens' privacy after the public raised alarms about contracts for the [Austin Police Department's Automated License Plate Reader \(ALPR\) program](#) and the recent [AI-powered surveillance cameras in Austin parks](#). The goal of the act is to create transparency in how city departments, including APD, obtain and use surveillance technology, ensuring that the public's privacy is protected.

The [TRUST Act](#) adds a new chapter to the City Code. It defines what constitutes surveillance technology, which includes drones with cameras or monitoring capabilities, automated license plate readers, and more. The act allows the Council to review and understand how a city department would use surveillance technology. Focusing on policing, APD would be required to follow the processes outlined in the TRUST Act. This includes developing a Privacy Impact Assessment, which determines whether surveillance technology poses more than a minimal risk to civil liberties and privacy rights, and a surveillance use policy, which details how the surveillance technology operates, how it is to be used, who can use it, data storage and retention, and required training for users. If APD wanted to obtain new surveillance technology, it would need to send both items to the Council to review four weeks before the Council votes on whether APD could use the technology. If approved, APD could acquire and use new surveillance technology and enter into a new agreement with a third-party entity to use or share information from the surveillance technology. If not approved, then APD would not be able to move forward with new technology.

In addition to the responsibilities that city departments have regarding new surveillance technology, the City Manager is currently reviewing how city departments use existing surveillance technology to determine whether it affects citizens' privacy rights. If any do, that department will have 270 days from the act's effective date to develop a surveillance use policy and obtain approval from the City Manager. If the department fails to develop its plan and obtain approval within the timeframe, it must end the use of existing surveillance technology until the policy is approved by the City Manager. Additionally, the City Manager is responsible for an annual surveillance report, which will be presented to the City Council, covering each surveillance use policy the Council approved in the prior fiscal year and how the surveillance technology was used.

Although the TRUST Act is designed to protect the privacy rights of the Austin community, challenges for balancing privacy and safety remain. When the Council voted not to extend the ALPR contract, APD no longer had access to the technology that had [resulted in 165 arrests, 133 prosecutions, and the recovery of one missing person](#). Under the TRUST Act, APD would be required to obtain the Council's approval before obtaining information from other police departments that use surveillance technology, such as the [Round Rock and Sunset Valley police departments](#), during joint investigations or general information sharing. However, the findings from the Austin City Auditor's Office, in which some APD officers [did not comply with their ALPR policy](#) in APD's General Orders by not including a case number or a reason when searching the ALPR database, contributed to questions on how ALPRs were being used. To ensure transparency and responsible use of these surveillance technologies, the TRUST Act would establish a standard approval and review process for surveillance technology used by city departments. The TRUST Act is a step toward maintaining the balance between citizens' privacy concerns and determining how to use new technology for public safety.