

# + Body Cameras Without Safeguards:

*How accountability tools can be weaponized for public surveillance.*

Body and dashboard cameras are being proposed for immigration enforcement agents to improve accountability. But the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is already using biometric and location tracking technologies to conduct mass surveillance of protesters, bystanders and anyone suspected of being an immigrant — all without warrants, consent or meaningful oversight.

**Without explicit prohibitions, mandating body cameras will not create accountability. It will fuel creation of the largest biometric surveillance system in American law enforcement history.**

## DHS's Current Surveillance Infrastructure Threatens Privacy

**Mobile Fortify**, a facial recognition application, [has been deployed](#) over **100,000 times** to scan faces and fingerprints in the field. The app queries databases containing **200 million images** — many from sources federal courts have deemed too inaccurate for arrest warrants. Internal DHS documents confirm that people “cannot refuse to be scanned.”

The app’s “Super Query” function lets any agent simultaneously search the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and other databases for information on individuals, vehicles, firearms and address — all by simply pointing a phone at someone’s face.

Two location tracking programs [Tangles](#) and [Webloc](#) allow agents to monitor cell phone data across entire neighborhoods. By drawing circles around protests, community centers or U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities, agents can track every phone present and follow those devices to homes and workplaces, with no warrant required.

Examples of abuse are growing:

- **Protester Database (January 2026):** A [leaked DHS memo](#) orders Minneapolis ICE and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) agents to complete “intel collection non-arrests” forms to “capture all images, license plates, identifications, and general information on hotels, agitators, protesters, etc.” Border czar Tom Homan publicly states: “We’re going to create a database where those people that are arrested for interference, impeding and assault, we’re going to make them famous.” In Maine, an ICE agent threatens a woman filming operations that her information will be entered into a “nice little database” that will be label her a domestic terrorist.
- **Intimidation of Civilians at Home (January 2026):** Federal agents [begin making house calls](#) to threaten volunteer ICE watchers at their residences. In Portland, Maine, an agent tells one volunteer, “This is a warning. We know you live right here,” while three cars block her street. When she calls 911, the dispatcher tells her to comply with federal agents. Multiple Minneapolis volunteers who monitor ICE operations and deliver supplies to immigrants report similar home visits by federal agents.

- **Aurora, Illinois (October 2025):** Video captures Border Patrol [agents using](#) Mobile Fortify on teenagers outside East Aurora High School. An agent is heard, asking “Can you do facials?” before pointing a phone at a minor’s face.
- **Senate Oversight (September 2025):** Nine senators — including Markey (D-MA), Wyden (D-OR), Warren (D-MA), Booker (D-NJ), Sanders (I-VT) and Schiff (D-CA) — [demand ICE explain](#) its policies and commit to ending Mobile Fortify use.
- **Wrongful Detention (April 2025):** ICE [detains](#) U.S. citizen Juan Carlos Lopez-Gomez for 30 hours in a county jail based on an incorrect “biometric confirmation of his identity.”
- **Illinois and Chicago Lawsuit:** The state and city [are suing](#) DHS for violating the Biometric Information Privacy Act (BIPA), alleging agents scan biometric information of Illinois residents without consent, without individualized suspicion and to retain that information for 15 years.

## Body Cameras as Surveillance Infrastructure

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Mandating body cameras without strict prohibitions would hand DHS raw material to continue to build out an unprecedented surveillance network:

- **Mass Biometric Collection:** Every enforcement interaction — plus bystanders, neighbors and advocates—would be recorded in high-definition video and fed into facial recognition systems.
- **Chilling First Amendment Rights:** Body camera footage would let DHS identify every person at protests, outside protected and sensitive locations or meeting with advocacy organizations.
- **Algorithmic Enforcement:** Real-time facial recognition could trigger enforcement actions based on algorithmic matches from databases known to be inaccurate — not individualized probable cause.
- **Discriminatory Impact:** A National Institute of Standards and Testing (NIST) study confirms facial recognition produces higher error rates for women and people of color. Deployment at scale would systematically expose Latino, Black, Asian, and Indigenous communities to misidentification and wrongful detention.

## What’s Required: Accountability, Not Surveillance

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Given these ongoing threats and harms, UnidosUS supports body and dashboard cameras only with comprehensive protections:

- Absolute prohibition on facial recognition and all biometric analysis of body camera footage.
- Strict purpose limitations ensuring footage is used solely for accountability review.

- Data isolation preventing integration with ICE targeting systems or fusion centers.
- Mandatory public disclosure of footage within 48 hours following deaths, serious injuries or constitutional violations.
- Independent investigation and oversight of alleged rights violations with regular audits, including by Inspectors General and Congressional bodies.
- Officer identification requirements prohibiting masks and requiring visible insignia.

State precedents exist: Oregon, New Hampshire and Minnesota prohibit facial recognition with police body cameras. Montana and Utah require warrants for any facial recognition use.

## Congressional Action Forms a Starting Point

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The [Realigning Mobile Phone Biometrics for American Privacy Protection Act](#), introduced by Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-MS-02) with caucus chair cosponsors, would prohibit Mobile Fortify use outside ports of entry and require destruction of U.S. citizen biometric data. This is a necessary first step.

## The Bottom Line

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**Body cameras without enforceable prohibitions are not accountability tools. They are surveillance infrastructure that will be exploited to target immigrant communities, chill protected speech and enable discriminatory enforcement at an unprecedented scale.**