DEFUND SHOTSPOTTER

a community toolkit

2024

DEFUND.
RE-ENVISION.
TRANSFORM.

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Who Are We?

Defund. Re-Envision. Transform. (DRT) is a grassroots campaign that seeks to defund SLMPD, re-envision public safety, and transform St. Louis.

What Is ShotSpotter?

ShotSpotter is a **police surveillance technology** that detects the sound of gunfire by using 20 to 25 live microphones per square mile in a designated area.[1]

The company behind ShotSpotter (now named "SoundThinking Inc.") uses human analysts and AI algorithms to determine the type and location of the "gunshot-like sounds," a process that is subject to **racist prejudices and biases**, as well as a lack of reliability, transparency, and reproducibility of results.

Data captured by ShotSpotter is utilized to closely watch, profile, and vigilantly patrol Black and Brown neighborhoods throughout St. Louis and can also serve as evidence in criminal court, despite the **lack of transparency** and peer reviews that have been conducted on ShotSpotter.[2]

INEFFECTIVE AT DETERRING CRIME

ShotSpotter Is Ineffective at Deterring Crime

1

A 10-year study[3] analyzing ShotSpotter's efficacy in St. Louis found that:

- ShotSpotter does not improve police response time to shots fired
- ShotSpotter is unproductive in uncovering crimes or perpetrators of crime
- ShotSpotter dispatches police after the offense occurs; it does not reduce or prevent gun violence from happening

2

A closer look at the numbers:

- **Out of 19,473 calls** generated by ShotSpotter between August 2008 and February 2018, **only 13 arrests** resulted from these calls
- Citizen-initiated calls are **over seven times more efficient** in covering and responding to criminal behavior

3

The bottom line:

We're not saying that quicker police response times and more arrests are the answer. We are saying that ShotSpotter **doesn't improve public safety**. Instead, it perpetuates a punitive approach to public safety, emphasizing reactive measures over proactive strategies that address the root causes of violence and promote community well-being.

ShotSpotter Endangers Communities of Color

1

Research shows that ShotSpotter increases the number of high-intensity interactions between police and civilians and that ShotSpotter often mistakes loud noises for gunshots.[4] These false alarms send police on numerous trips into primarily Black communities on high alert expecting to potentially confront a dangerous situation when none such exists. Given the already tragic number of shootings of Black people by SLMPD, that is a recipe for trouble.

2

Placing sensors in certain neighborhoods but not others results in the police detecting more incidents, whether they are real or false, in areas with sensors. This can skew gunfire statistics and create a cycle where over-policing in communities of color is justified based on these distorted statistics.

19,473 calls generated by ShotSpotter resulted in only 13 arrests.
Costs range from $65,000 to $95,000 per square mile.
SLMPD dedicates $300,000 to ShotSpotter annually.
ShotSpotter costs St. Louis County $718,000.

SHOTSPOTTER IS EXPENSIVE

ShotSpotter Is Expensive

1. The price of ShotSpotter ranges from **$65,000 to $90,000** per square mile annually, accompanied by a one-time Service Initiation fee of **$10,000** per square mile.[5]

2. In 2021, the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department (SLMPD) allocated **$190,000** to the ShotSpotter program, entirely sourced from asset forfeiture.[6]

3. Today, an increased budget of **$300,000** ($304,917.00) is annually dedicated to ShotSpotter police surveillance technologies in St. Louis City.[7]

4. ShotSpotter costs St. Louis County **$718,000**.[8]

Investing in Communities Instead

In recent years, the adoption of ShotSpotter police surveillance technology has garnered attention for its substantial costs and questionable impact on community well-being. This substantial investment prompts reflection on alternative uses for these funds, particularly in addressing pressing community needs. Let's imagine how we could redirect these financial resources to uplift BIPOC, working-class, and marginalized communities:

- **Warming centers and high-quality shelters:** establishing warming centers for the unhoused, providing essential shelter and support during harsh weather conditions.
- **Housing:** pouring funds into establishing affordable housing programs, reconstructing abandoned homes and revitalizing communities, and funding the Tenant Bill of Rights and Tenants' Right to Counsel.
- **Mental health resources, restorative justice, and alternatives to prison:** mental health facilities, restorative justice programs, drug rehabilitation treatment facilities, mental health response units.

Get Involved

1. Follow **@defundslmpd** on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, and learn more about the campaign at **drt-stl.org**.

2. Sign up to receive emails about upcoming trainings and actions at **bit.ly/drtnewsletter**.

3. Attend our **monthly Movement Meeting** every first Thursday of the month.

Sources

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