



## VIA EMAIL

June 10, 2024

Pasadena City Hall  
100 North Garfield Ave.  
Pasadena, CA 91101

Pasadena City Council: Mayor Victor Gordo; Councilmember Tyron Hampton; Councilmember Justin Jones; Councilmember Jason Lyon; Councilmember Steve Madison; Councilmember Gene Masuda; Councilmember Jess Rivas; Councilmember Felicia Willams

Cc: Pasadena Police Chief Gene Harris; City Manager Miguel Marquez; City Clerk Mark Jomsky

### **Re: Pasadena Shotspotter Pilot Conclusion**

As the end of the 3-year pilot of gunshot detection system Shotspotter (AKA SoundThinking) in Pasadena looms, the future of this technology's operation in the City is unclear. The lackluster performance of Shotspotter in Pasadena is in-step with other cities across the nation who are finding that this gunshot detection technology does not deliver on its promises, is unreliable, ineffective, resource intensive and a threat to civil liberties. Do we have to accept gun violence? No. However, we don't have to accept technology that promises but fails to reduce gun violence either.

### **Pasadena Shotspotter Review**

In October 2021, as a response to an uptick in gun violence, Pasadena turned to Shotspotter which claims its technology will prevent gun-violence, save lives, preserve evidence and apprehend suspects. Pasadena City Council approved a 3-year pilot program at a cost of \$640,000 for three years covering a 3-square mile area in Northwest Pasadena.<sup>1</sup> After a belated 12-month review of Shotspotter in October 2023, no action was taken at that time; nor was there the promise of a future thorough review in collaboration with the Community Police Oversight Commission (which was newly formed at the time the City Council decided to approve the 3-year pilot) to either terminate or extend the use of the technology. Despite PPD's glowing presentation,<sup>2</sup> actual analysis of the data showed that PPD responses to Shotspotter alerts led to dead ends 75% of the time and the Department had spent 285 hours responding to alerts.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.pasadenanow.com/main/controversial-shotspotter-contract-approved>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.pasadenanow.com/main/six-months-later-police-say-shotspotter-a-worthwhile-tool>

<sup>3</sup><https://knock-la.com/data-shows-shotspotter-leads-to-dead-ends-and-wasted-resources-in-pasadena/>

Shotspotter's ability to prevent people from getting shot or dying in Pasadena is questionable.<sup>4</sup> It can't even be counted on to classify gunshots. In at least a dozen incidents, bombs were classified as gunshots, and even then weren't able to lead PPD to the perpetrator - who was finally apprehended when detonating an explosive within the vicinity of police officers!<sup>5</sup>

Worse still, when Eric Robinson was shot and killed in October 2002, Shotspotter picked up the audio but erroneously classified that it was not a gunshot and therefore no police or other emergency services were dispatched to the scene.<sup>6</sup> How much time will it be before an incident like that in Chicago happens here - where 13 year old Adam Toledo was chased, shot, and killed by a Chicago police officer in response to a ShotSpotter alert?<sup>7</sup> We should find wild goose chases (false positives) and tragedies like Eric Robinson uncompassionately labeled as technology "errors" (or false negatives) unacceptable.

Moreover, the very few other cities in Los Angeles County tepidly willing to try Shotspotter are doing so by co-opting the fact that Pasadena is using it. E.g. Pico Rivera's one-year pilot report stated "ShotSpotter is in use in the cities of Pasadena, San Francisco, and Oakland and has been approved by their respective, strict privacy commissions."<sup>8</sup> Pasadena absolutely does not have a privacy oversight body. And Oakland's Privacy Commission has just recommended to their City Council that the program be terminated. Finally, no Pasadena oversight body - privacy or other - has reviewed Shotspotter.

### **Cities Across the Country are Abandoning and Rejecting Shotspotter**

The performance of Shotspotter in Pasadena is not an anomaly, rather it is on par with the performance of Shotspotter in other cities. Lackluster results, mounting evidence and research debunking the proclaimed merits of Shotspotter's technology have led several cities across the nation to decline to continue using Shotspotter.

- 2024: Chicago, IL;<sup>9</sup> Seattle, WA;<sup>10</sup> Mobile, AL;<sup>11</sup> Houston, TX<sup>12</sup>
- 2023: Portland, OR;<sup>13</sup> Durham, NC;<sup>14</sup> Indianapolis, IN<sup>15</sup>
- 2022: San Diego, CA;<sup>16</sup> Atlanta, GA;<sup>17</sup> Greenbay, WI;<sup>18</sup> Buffalo, NY<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.pasadenanow.com/main/man-fatally-shot-in-pasadena>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/losangeles/news/man-accused-of-setting-off-over-150-explosions-in-pasadena/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.pasadenanow.com/main/man-found-in-street-shot-to-death-investigation-underway>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/chicago/news/adam-toledo-little-village-fatal-police-shooting-armed-confrontation/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://picoriveraspeaks.org/meetings/72>

<sup>9</sup> <https://chicago.suntimes.com/2024/02/13/mayor-johnson-to-end-shotspotter-deal-after-summer>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/seattle-mayor-bruce-harrell-shelves-plans-for-shotspotter-technology/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://mynbc15.com/news/local/mobile-not-renewing-shot-spotter-contract>

<sup>12</sup> <https://hoodline.com/2024/05/houston-to-deactivate-controversial-3-5-million-shotspotter-program-amid-scrutiny-over-effectiveness-and-racial-profiling-concerns/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.opb.org/article/2023/06/01/portland-shotspotter-gunshot-detection-technology-police-firearms-crime/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.wral.com/story/durham-won-t-renew-shotspotter-contract-following-city-council-vote/21203098/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.wishtv.com/news/indiana-news/indys-shotspotter-pilot-is-over-so-why-are-the-sensors-still-there/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/san-diego-city-council-review-of-renewal-of-spotshotter-system-pulled-from-agenda/2670781/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.11alive.com/article/news/crime/apd-shotspotter-technology/85-79f2851c-023e-45bc-b69e-8dcddedbe2814>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.greenbaypressgazette.com/story/news/2022/09/21/green-bay-delays-vote-branding-initiative-oks-license-plate-cams/8071915001/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.wkbw.com/news/local-news/city-of-buffalo-adopts-amended-2023-budget-eliminates-proposed-shotspotter-funding>

- 2021: Independence, MO;<sup>20</sup> Long Beach, CA<sup>21</sup>
- 2020: Grand Rapids, MI;<sup>22</sup> Dayton, OH<sup>23</sup>
- 2012-2019: Canton, OH;<sup>24</sup> St. Paul, MN;<sup>25</sup> Fall River, MA;<sup>26</sup> Austin, TX;<sup>27</sup> San Antonio, TX;<sup>28</sup> Wichita, KS;<sup>29</sup> Charlotte, NC;<sup>30</sup> Dallas, TX;<sup>31</sup> Los Angeles, CA;<sup>32</sup> New Orleans, LA;<sup>33</sup> Beloit, WI<sup>34</sup>
- Currently under reconsideration: Boston, MA;<sup>35</sup> Oakland, CA<sup>36</sup>

**A National Institute of Justice** report found ShotSpotter did not reduce the occurrence of shots-fired calls for service, fatal shootings, non-fatal shootings or other violent felonies committed with firearms. The introduction of ShotSpotter in police districts had no impact on gun-violence crime clearance rates (the proportion of cases solved by police).<sup>37</sup>

**A Redwood City** survey of 27 police officers on the effectiveness of Shotspotter noted that:<sup>38</sup>

- 100% said Shotspotter will not increase the likelihood that the victim of a shooting will survive.
- 92% said ShotSpotter will not increase the likelihood someone will be arrested.
- 88% said ShotSpotter will not make them more effective when handling shots fired incidents.

**The MacArthur Justice Foundation** found that 89% of Shotspotter reports led police to find no gun-related crime, and 86% turned up no crime at all.<sup>39</sup>

**The Chicago Inspector General** found that about 90% of ShotSpotter alerts were false positives and had resulted in the dispatch of police 40,000 times when no gun-related violence had taken place.<sup>40</sup>

**A multi-institution study of 68 large metropolitan counties** in the US found “ShotSpotter technology has no significant impact on firearm-related homicides or arrest outcomes.”<sup>41</sup>

<sup>20</sup><https://www.themarshallproject.org/2022/10/13/how-a-suburb-spent-covid-relief-on-sniper-rifles-tactical-helmets-and-police-bonuses>

<sup>21</sup><https://beachcomber.news/content/why-doesn%E2%80%99t-long-beach-have-gunfire-location-technology>

<sup>22</sup><https://www.wzzm13.com/article/news/grand-rapids-votes-no-on-cares-act-grant-for-grpd/69-a733c09b-e45f-4d47-9519-50e03cce551f>

<sup>23</sup><https://www.daytondailynews.com/local/dayton-not-renewing-contract-with-shotspotter-program/PYYGLLNVRJGUHEAF40SJJ7K4NA/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.govtech.com/public-safety/canton-ohio-to-part-ways-with-shotspotter-expand-system.html>

<sup>25</sup><https://www.mprnews.org/story/2019/11/20/gunshot-sensor-technology-likely-wont-be-part-of-st-pauls-crime-response>

<sup>26</sup><https://www.govtech.com/public-safety/after-too-many-shots-missed-fall-river-mass-ends-deal-with-shotspotter.html>

<sup>27</sup><https://www.kxan.com/news/how-technology-could-help-austin-police-prevent-shootings/>

<sup>28</sup><https://www.mysanantonio.com/news/local/article/City-pulls-plug-on-pricey-gunshot-detection-system-11817475.php>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.kwch.com/content/news/Wichita-to-consider-Shot-Spotter-gunshot-detection-technology-465155373.html>

<sup>30</sup><https://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/local/crime/article59685506.html>

<sup>31</sup><https://www.dallasnews.com/news/2015/05/12/years-after-flirting-with-sensors-that-detect-gunshots-dallas-deems-technology-too-pricey/>

<sup>32</sup><https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-pol-ca-gunshot-detection-bill-20170312-story.html>

<sup>33</sup><https://www.wvlv.com/article/news/crime/new-orleans-city-council-police-shotspotter-technology-crime-reduction-shootings/289-966251f7-4097-4c61-bbba-f4c1138e81de>

<sup>34</sup><https://www.wpr.org/milwaukee-committed-shotspotter-outcomes-data-remain-elusive>

<sup>35</sup><https://www.boston.com/news/local-news/2024/05/20/what-is-shotspotter-controversial-gunshot-detection-technology-facing-increasing-scrutiny/>

<sup>36</sup><https://oakland-observer.ghost.io/pac-recommends-ditching-shotspotter-grim-drill-down-on-budget-woes-at-finance-mtg-ne-wsoms-flock-claim-repackages-old-questionable-info/>

<sup>37</sup><https://nij.ojp.gov/library/publications/learning-about-shotspotter-and-gun-violence-chicago>

<sup>38</sup><https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/180112.pdf>

<sup>39</sup><https://www.macarthurjustice.org/blog2/shotspotter-is-a-failure-whats-next/>

<sup>40</sup><https://igchicago.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Chicago-Police-Departments-Use-of-ShotSpotter-Technology.pdf>

<sup>41</sup><https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33929640/>

Reporting on **Pasadena City** data found Shotspotter leads to dead ends 75% of the time and wasted resources.<sup>42</sup>

### **Shotspotter Under Scrutiny For Threats To Civil Rights and Misuse of Taxpayer Funds**

In May 2024, Members of US Congress called into question not only the effectiveness and accuracy of Shotspotter, but expressed concerns about how the use of the technology - which is predominantly deployed in already marginalized communities of color - exacerbates discrimination, over-policing and civil rights violations.<sup>43</sup> Members of US Congress are urging the Department of Homeland Security Inspector General to investigate, as several cities utilized Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) grant funds to acquire Shotspotter.

For the reasons stated above, I respectfully ask that Pasadena not extend Shotspotter and instead look into evidence-based solutions moving forward with future public safety investments addressing gun violence that do not infringe on civil liberties.

Respectfully,



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<sup>42</sup><https://knock-la.com/data-shows-shotspotter-leads-to-dead-ends-and-wasted-resources-in-pasadena/>

<sup>43</sup>[https://www.markey.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/shotspotter\\_dhs\\_oig\\_letter\\_51424.pdf](https://www.markey.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/shotspotter_dhs_oig_letter_51424.pdf)