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For Immediate Release

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Oakland Committee Voting On Ending Secretive Surveillance

Transparency Ordinance Grants Community Control Over Spying Equipment Use

Oakland-On May 9 at 6pm, the Public Safety Committee of the Oakland City Council will vote on approving a sweeping ordinance that requires City Council approval prior to possible acquisition and use of surveillance technology. For approved proposals, the ordinance mandates implementation of usage policies, determinations of cost/benefit analysis, civil rights and privacy impact reports, and ongoing oversight via annual reporting.

The comprehensive ordinance was developed by the city's Privacy Advisory Commission. The PAC was created after Oakland's community waged a multi-year battle to prevent a Homeland Security-funded citywide spying dragnet called the Domain Awareness Center.

The Privacy Advisory Commission modeled their version of the ordinance after a Santa Clara County law adopted in June of 2016, a groundbreaking achievement as the first local surveillance equipment transparency ordinance in the nation. The Oakland ordinance seeks to codify the informal framework that resulted in the PAC's creation of privacy and use policies for FLIR (Thermal Imaging Camera) and Stingray (Cell Phone Interceptors) equipment, both of which were adopted unanimously by Oakland's City Council. The ordinance also provides for whistleblower protection, and prohibits entering into non-disclosure agreements.

Privacy Advisory Commission chair Brian Hofer commented: "Unfettered surveillance doesn't just waste public money and abuse our civil liberties. It endangers lives. Trump has access to tools that would make the Stasi and KGB envious. We must institutionalize limits to surveillance, prohibit secret uses, require maximum oversight and transparency, and impose penalties for misconduct."

Oakland's City Attorney and City Administrator have recommended adoption of the ordinance, following a unanimous vote by the Privacy Advisory Commission. Similar ordinances are under discussion in several Bay Area cities, counties and regional entities including Alameda County, Palo Alto, Richmond, Berkeley and the Bay Area Rapid Transit District.

Community activists hailed the proposed ordinance as a much-needed protection for over policed groups including Oakland's fearful immigrant population, Muslims and people of Middle Eastern descent. Media Alliance director and Oakland Privacy member Tracy Rosenberg commented: "It isn't a mystery where surveillance hits hardest - people targeted for deportation, characterized as terrorists, or used as fodder for mass incarceration. Without lifting the veil of secrecy surrounding use of surveillance technologies upon vulnerable groups, we cannot have truly safe communities. This ordinance is all about genuine public safety – for all of us who live, work in, and visit Oakland."

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Oakland Privacy works regionally to defend the right to privacy and enhance public transparency and oversight regarding the use of surveillance techniques and equipment. More at www.oaklandprivacy.org