

Utah lawmakers worry over real-time surveillance program's reach and whether it creates 'Big Brother'

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SALT LAKE CITY — Utah legislative leaders expressed concerns about an artificial intelligence surveillance program that would sweep up social media posts, traffic cameras and other sources of information.

The program, designed by the company Banjo, is designed to alert law enforcement to a real-time emergency from an accident to a mass shooting. But lawmakers fear it could be exploited and become "Big Brother."

Appearing before the Utah State Legislature's Executive Appropriations Committee, Department of Public Safety Commissioner Jess Anderson asked for \$2 million in funding to build out Banjo in the state. He gave an overview of the program and its potential benefits. House Majority Leader Francis Gibson, R-Mapleton, worried about its potential for abuse. "Big Brother here," he said of the program. "We're watching everything you do. Social media, you name it. Is that pretty much what this is?"

"This does have that capability," Commissioner Anderson conceded.

"Thus, that's what this is. Just because it has that capability, in reality that's what it is," Rep. Gibson replied.

Anderson and Utah Attorney General Sean Reyes' Chief of Staff, Ric Cantrell, insisted the program anonymized any data it collects.

"We believe Utah is the right place to develop this kind of technology. The data streams we're going to access are not the kinds you're going to need a warrant to access," said Cantrell. "It's just things that are out there that are in silos."

Banjo puts all those pieces together in one location, he added. It could be extremely beneficial in a child kidnapping and Cantrell noted the Utah Attorney General's Office has already been training with it for AMBER Alert situations.

So far, Utah has granted Banjo access to the Utah Department of Transportation's traffic camera network. Anderson said they want to use it for traffic emergencies.

Lawmakers debated the merits of the system and whether it had the potential for abuse. Rep. Angela Romero, D-Salt Lake City, said she had problems with facial recognition systems ([of which Utah DPS faced recent scrutiny for](#)) and targeting people.

"I still am not a big fan of the programs," she said.

Senate Minority Whip Luz Escamilla, D-Salt Lake City, raised concerns about racial profiling. Rep. Gibson called Banjo "North Korea-esque."

"In a way we're creating the NSA Utah," he said. "Gather all that information that you don't have a warrant for."

Senate Minority Leader Karen Mayne, D-West Valley City, pointed out how much info the public already gives away. Senate President Stuart Adams, R-Layton, pointed out that data is given away when you use the GPS option on your phone and it can be anonymized.

"The data's out there. I don't know that we should eliminate those apps because the fact the data's there, but I am really concerned about the privacy," he said.

Late Tuesday, the ACLU of Utah and the Libertas Institute expressed concerns about the program.

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"This is a system that's based on public safety and the need of public safety," [@UtahDPS](#) Commissioner Anderson says.

He acknowledges there's "Big Brother" concerns about it. [@votegibson](#) is NOT a fan of \$2.2 million to be "Big Brother." [@fox13](#) [#utpol](#)



[ACLU of Utah@acluutah](#)

A big privacy concern is that surveillance tools are always used beyond original scope There is always mission creep. Did any [#UT](#) resident getting a driver's license photo know it was going to be scanned by 1000x by facial recognition software? [#utleg](#)

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Law enforcement will always push for more access, more data, more control.

That's why restraints are needed. Giving them what they want for "public safety" typically

undermines or eviscerates privacy protections. #utpol
<https://twitter.com/benwinslow/status/1163884226971750400> ...

Ben Winslow

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Utah DPS is seeking \$2.2 million in additional funding to build out the program by the end of the year. In an interview with FOX 13, Commissioner Anderson insisted there were safeguards in place to guarantee privacy.

"All information that's feeding this from everywhere is anonymized," he said. "By the time it hits their computer, there is no identification to it at all."