

Brittany Battle (she/her): Welcome to the 7th episode of The People's Report! We're back to give you some information about things that are happening in our community, in our neighborhood so that y'all can make sure that you're informed about what's taking place. And so, we played that song as a little cheeky reference to the things that we're talking about today that are actually really, really serious um and impact the ways that we all experience policing in Winston Salem and in Forsyth County. So today we're going to be talking about how surveillance technology has really, really, really increased and even just in 2020 and 2021, the things that the Winston Salem Police Department and the Forsyth County Sheriff's Office are doing are really expanding the ways that these police agencies are able to surveil, track, monitor our movements, right. And also to really expand policing into something that looks more like the military, right, that we don't need anywhere, right, because imperialism is not good, right. So we don't want to say it's okay for this to be happening in Afghanistan & Iraq- this is not what we're saying- but and we're definitely saying that it's not okay to be happening in our neighborhoods here in Winston Salem and Forsyth County. So one of the things, before we jump in and start talking about some of the different programs that these two law enforcement agencies have installed recently, I want to give a little bit of information about one of the main programs that has really acted as a source of funding for these types of programs- and that's a grant program that comes from the Department of Justice, right, and so it's the Justice Assistance Grant Program, you'll often hear them called JAG grants, and Winston Salem has gotten several of these to fund different initiatives that they're doing locally. And so this program comes out of the 80s, right, just peak War on Drugs time when a New York City officer was killed on the job, right. So he was surveilling in a case and some folks killed him, right, so because that his death, his murder, was just like seized upon, right, for politicians to say, hey we need to expand policing even more to make sure these types of things don't happen'. And so this program was installed by the United States Justice Department to say, 'we're going to throw money at local police departments to militarize, we're going to throw money at police departments to increase surveillance'. And it's important to note, a lot of these types of surveillance and the militarization of police, have no indication that they do anything, *anything* to reduce crime, right. It's almost as if police departments are pretending that they are action figures and they want to drive tanks and use cool guns, right, and use cool new surveillance technology in ways that really are harmful to our communities broadly speaking, but particularly harmful to the communities that are most impacted by policing and that's our Black and brown communities, our queer communities, our undocumented communities, right- where we know that this surveillance technology is not going to go to Buena Vista, right, this surveillance technology is going to be used in East Winston. And so it's really important that we understand what the technologies are, how they're being used, and what the implications of those technologies are in our community. So we're gonna get started talking about some of the things that our local police, both Winston Salem police and Forsyth County Sheriff's Office, as I-

Brittany Battle (she/her): said have done. First we'll jump into talking about how the police department, our local police department, utilized what was COVID relief dollars, in the height of the pandemic this summer, the height of the pandemic- to purchase equipment to quell protests. And this is really important that you all understand the ways that this money is being secretly used, right, in ways that are not actually doing anything in support of our community. So Bailey, can you jump in and talk about that a little bit?

Bailey Pittenger (she/her): Yes, thank you Brittany. Something to keep in mind with federal and state grants is that they don't always have to be reported in the budgets for the city and the county. So some of these grants happen and then we find out after the fact what they've been used for. And so this was the case with the Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding Grant, which uses the same formula as a JAG grant that Brittany mentioned earlier, but it's multiplied to be a bit more because of the pandemic, to provide extra funding to public safety departments across the nation. So Winston Salem Police Department received over half a million of this specific grant last spring- and what this grant was used for was laptop computers and online citizen reporting systems, you're already seeing some kind of gesture towards more technology and that was in response to the pandemic, street smart software which was intended to combat the increased crime or predicted increased crime due to job losses and the reduction of officers on the street, PPE and lastly, this grant was used for a civil disobedience response team equipment. And so I'm going to read what this entails straight from the pdf that gives us what this grant was used for. So this is the civil disobedience response team equipment- 'Based on events in Raleigh and in other nationwide cities, civil disobedience against shelter in place orders have posed major safety risks to civilians, government officials, and law enforcement. Whether through the threat of violence or simply through potential exposure to COVID 19 via large crowds assembling, law enforcement have been called to respond to these incidents. To ensure that the city's police department is prepared to protect its civil disobedience response team, outdated equipment must be replaced so that is up to code'. This equipment (so this is what the funding was used for) the equipment included shields, barricades, gloves, passive protector tools, helmets, shin and arm protectors, gas mask carriers, gas mask filters, magnum foggers and magnum fogger carriers. So all of those are militarized pieces of equipment that were purchased with what was intended to be something that would help public safety in the face of a pandemic.

Brittany Battle (she/her): So y'all, over half a million dollars. Right. We're in the height of the pandemic where people are getting evicted, dozens of people a day are having eviction proceedings heard, and I just want to point this out, right, we had a CDC moratorium that did not stop evictions being processed in this city. So as people are being evicted, losing their jobs, we have our police department spending over half a million dollars on gas masks, right-

Brittany Battle (she/her): This is the same police department that was arresting protesters without even a face mask to protect the protesters from COVID- but they are purchasing gas masks. Have y'all seen the need for a gas mask in Winston Salem? Anybody? I did not. I did not, right, so now we spent a half a million dollars on what? To get what toys, right, toys for police officers to play with. Bailey, do you have anything else to add about how they were spending that money, what they were doing?

Bailey Pittenger (she/her): I think the important thing to add with that is that any time equipment is purchased, it also requires more personnel and more training. So anytime we see an expansion of equipment purchased it also reflects, like even if it's just a half million for this, it results in more budgetary needs for the training for this equipment as well as to make sure that there's personnel to hold the equipment. So it has a really big effect, not just on these grants we see coming in but also how we then fund the use of these grants with our own taxpayer dollars. So that's why we see a budget with WSPD as large as \$78 million.

Brittany Battle (she/her): And I want to circle back to something that you said in the beginning- once we start talking about the ways that PR is done around these expenditures because do we see any PR around this expenditure? Hell no, right? We did not see this publicized at all. They did not tell us that they got a grant for a half a million dollars while people were being evicted, right? And it's important- the city would like you to believe that there's nothing that they can do about the eviction crisis- that is false, right, that is false. The city would like you to believe that. Right, so none of these things are happening in a vacuum. Right. Funding for policing does not happen in a vacuum, right, anything that a city is spending money on is demonstrating to you where their commitments lie- and if their commitments during a pandemic were with buying gas masks and barricades to prevent peaceful non-violent protests, right, that that tells you what they're committed to. Terrance, can you talk a little bit about this new real-time intelligence center (RTIC)? Right, so for before Terrance, before you jump in, let's show the commercial, right, that has been put out for this intelligence center. I want y'all to really pay attention to the symbolism, right, to the ways that messages are being delivered. In this commercial, right, the way that PR is being handled, the way that information, particular information, is being shared or not shared, right, so let's go ahead and show that clip.

Brittany Battle (she/her): Y'all... I mean, they're just so, Terrance, can you help me please, can you help me?

Terrence (he/him): I'll try my best, I want to go back to something that Brittany mentioned earlier on just around the reality that some of the same tactics that are being used in the interest of U.S. imperialism abroad are used here in various ways. A professor and scholar-

Terrence (he/him): that I really look up to, there's a lot of work around propaganda and things of that nature- about two years ago he was talking about how the U.S. military was running these domestic war games- and the stated reason for them running those domestic war games was because they were reading the signs of the times, they were watching unprecedented wealth inequality, watching the upward redistribution of wealth to the one percent, and it doesn't take, you know, a rocket scientist to realize that these are really good conditions for revolts and uprisings. So they were anticipating the kind of uprisings we saw this summer. And so they put all of this effort in trying to prepare themselves- which for me, I think has a really good application here in Winston Salem. So in Winston Salem, it's well known that we are a city where childhood poverty is nearly intractable, we're only outrated, in terms of being the worst city to grow up in poverty, by two Indigenous Reservations. And that's horrible that that's happening to our Indigenous siblings as well, but it just goes to show you the kind of conditions we have in Winston Salem. And rather than deal with the root causes, rather than figure out how we do what's necessary for all of our citizens to flourish, we again pour the money towards surveilling. And so it just shows you that policing, this whole program of trying to get citizens and businesses all across Forsyth County to register their security cams, the coordinated effort, really just shows how the system is not about preventative measures- the power structure is about hunting and caging, not healing and care. Let me say that again, the power structure is way more willing to invest and coordinate for hunting and caging rather than healing and care. And so it's just wild to me that we have this massive campaign to get everyone to register their cameras and I'm just wondering like what would it look like to invest that kind of energy, that kind of creativity, which we saw in in this darn near you know hollywood level motion picture movie trailer that our local sheriff department put out, what would it look like for that kind of energy and effort to go into the type of things that prevent crime in the first place? And so that's the first thing that just comes up from me, that this is just another example of how we are not committed to the well-being of the poor and oppressed, we're committed to protecting capital, we're committed to a racial, gendered order that keeps some outside of opportunity and others you know having an over share of opportunity. And so the second piece that I wanted to say is this like this is copaganda y'all.

Brittany Battle (she/her): Period.

Terrence (he/him): The United States is one of the most propagandized, I would argue the most propagandized nation in human history. And the way that the FBI and police departments even have their fingers and footprints on hollywood productions, like speaking into the writing of scripts and things of that nature- then you look here, locally, and you see this again, this movie trailer thing that's designed to communicate a message that's wildly misleading! What you get looking at the video is that- okay, I register my camera and now all of a sudden there's going to-

Terrence (he/him): be some person who 24/7 who is going to be surveilling my apartment, my property to make sure that no one harms me, no one breaks in, no one robs me, right? And I don't think any of us believe for a second that that's really the kind of human power that the sheriff's department has, and then even if they did have that kind of human power, they're not watching your front porch like that baby, I hate to tell you. So let's cut through the lies that this is propagating and let's just tell the truth about it- they are attempting to manufacture consent. They want us to think that we'll be safe if only big brother's eyes are always watching and in one sense, they are already always watching, right, but they want to strengthen the surveillance state but it doesn't keep us safe. What keeps people safe is housing. What keeps people safe is health care. What keeps people safe is jobs with livable wages. What keeps people safe are the things that are about community, not about the carceral state. The last thing I'll say, which you know this is the part that really just bothered me so much, this video is a clever, I don't know who they got in their PR department,

Brittany Battle (she/her): Terrence you don't know? They hire professional PR people- this is not like a sheriff deputy, these are professional PR people that are hired by the sheriff's department

Terrence (he/him): Thank you for putting me on to that because clearly these are very skilled people and what they're doing is blurring the contradiction- this is what Kwame Ture will talk about is like in certain situations of oppression, the contradictions are just so plain and evident. COVID 19 is one of those moments where the contradictions are plain and evident, we'll spend money on everything but the people, right? And the contradictions around policing are plain and evident in the wake of an uprising um this past summer. However, they're pretty good, pretty skilled at blurring those contradictions so it wouldn't be wise, it probably would cause an uproar, if the video showed, let's say you know, a suburban upper middle class white lady and her white child, you know being robbed by a Black man or a brown man, right. You can't do that because that's gonna raise too many eyebrows, right, so what we'll do is we'll do an inverse of it- we'll flip the characters and so we'll put a Black woman in a well- I mean them houses were nice weren't they y'all- with a Black woman with her child in this well-off neighborhood and then we'll put a white man out there. And so what happens, this is psychological warfare because now perhaps Black and brown folks and white accomplices are watching this, 'well okay maybe they are about protecting Black and brown people, maybe they are about the well-being of you know oppressed marginalized communities'. However, we maintain that policing is, from its inception to it's present, anti-Black, anti-Brown, anti-indigenous, anti-poor anti-queer, anti-homeless, institution and it remains such no matter how many commercials and movie trailers they put out to make us think that 'oh something's changed'- ain't nothing changed y'all. And so we gotta, they're blurring the contradictions-

Terrence (he/him): but we gotta cut through them and show that you know these security cams are trying to blanket a city that needs to be blanketed with justice, with uh security cameras is the wrong way to go. The right way to go, if I could just pull for my faith tradition, is to let justice roll down like an everlasting thing, that's what we need, that's what we need.

Brittany Battle (she/her): I mean there's so much, right, so my thing with this is like okay so they claim that they're watching your camera, so what if what if somebody that you're affiliated with is doing something that's perceived criminal? What if somebody's walking down the street with a you know open container, with a blunt, they rolling up on those people as well? Like y'all have to keep in mind: when you allow someone to surveil your property, they're going to surveil your property. You understand what I'm saying? And so not in a protective sense because just like Terrence pointed out, the sheriff's department does not have the capacity to have someone sitting in front watching those cameras all the time and in fact, a lot of the literature that they've released about this program says that they are not going to access your cameras 24 hours a day, that they will only access your cameras if a crime has been committed and they need evidence. So the fact that they've put this commercial out to incentivize or to you know make it seem glamorous like you're going to now have a personal security system from the sheriff's department if you sign these documents- that is not reality. That is not reality. Right?

Terrence (he/him): And one quick thing, this week, a couple days ago the journal released an article talking about a six-year-old who had to sit in front of a judge in a Forsyth County Court, in our Forsyth County Court for the crime of picking flowers from a neighbor's yard. and I'm just thinking about like is that kind of thing going to be caught on camera? What kind of activity, like Brittney said, is going to be caught, captured, and then used ultimately to actually harm and hurt those who actually put up the camera thinking it's going to help them be safe? The opposite is more likely to happen, especially if you Black or brown or working class, poor- the opposite is likely to happen.

Brittany Battle (she/her): And y'all, I mean just to reiterate something that Terrence said about if the resources that were put into these types of things, right, so we know from the Forsyth County Sheriff's Office budget that the person who does their filming, right, makes \$63,000 a year, in in budget cycle 21-22, \$63,000 a year salary, right. Can you imagine if we put \$63,000 dollars a year into something that is going to prevent people from having to make difficult choices? Right, people are making difficult choices. And it's so important to me because you know i'm not a parent, right, but I have a lot of kids that I really love them like I am a parent and I know a lot of my friends are parents and have people that they care about strongly and I know every single one of them would say, if their child or their loved one was not able to eat, they would do whatever was possible to make them be able to eat. If their loved one was not able-

Brittany Battle (she/her): to get a crucial surgery, they would do whatever is possible, right, we all watched John Q. with Denzel loved that movie- he took the pistol in there and held it to him and said y'all gonna do the surgery, right, and we all related to that, 'yeah we'd take a pistol in there too right? Everybody related to that and so people are making hard decisions, right, and I think that's important for us to keep that in mind- we don't want anyone to have to respond, we don't want police to have to respond after someone's harmed, we want to prevent the conditions that create the need for harm to occur, right. Let's jump on this, man there's so much, let's jump on this the use of drones, right, because now you know drones have become a big thing, it's a toy, right. Everybody wants to fly the drone, take pictures, take footage, take you know what i'm saying gopro and this and that right? But now our police are using them, um let's show that clip about how they're constructing a narrative around how drones are being used.

Brittany Battle (she/her): Y'all, I'm just, oh man Jillian, Jillian- what are we looking at here?

Jillian Sechrest (she/her): A massive waste of money that would go just to surveillance. So, I like to lighten things like this that are presented as extremely banal and harmless as a trojan horse. So we know the situation with surveillance is you're gonna initially have this device that has cameras that could be utilized for more nefarious reasons. They're going to send that up in the air, we're going to say that's good, all right, you have that base allowance. What is going to stop them from again just continuing to increment, you know, incrementally raise what they're actually surveilling and then also what we're investing in this program? Because as you heard in there, you have to go through licensure with the federal aviation administration just the FAA so what is going to be the additional taxpayer cost that comes to that to basically justify those line items and the budget? You want to utilize the drones, you have to have training, that's going to be more money allocated potentially to the Winston Salem Police Department budget. Additionally, we also have, whenever looking into this, considering it's not very well regulated since it is newer technology- there's no national law that dictates how drones can be used by law enforcement. So essentially, right now, there's no federal guidance on what law enforcement can use these actual little surveillance drones for. In North Carolina, there is a general statute to guide utilization of drones and it has a nice little caveat and the law makes a number of exceptions basically for drones used by law enforcement. So whenever these drones are being used, if they go out and they look into that information or they see that hey we might have further justification to dig further for this cause (as we see happens with the police constantly when it comes to searches) then they would actually have that segway to get in and further exploit it- so it ties in a lot to like what was said with the camera. If they are basically able to surveil you from your home or surveil your neighbors by having access to your camera then like how could that not be the same whenever we're discussing the situation with drones? So it's just a very slippery slope that could lead to a more surveilled community which again we-

Jillian Sechrest (she/her): know would create a more unsafe environment for many of our marginalized communities. So that's a really big concern and I find it extremely questionable that James Taylor can basically go and be quoted to say that the technology is gonna better serve citizens. So for this to be a city of art and innovation, we really don't want to innovate the way that we can serve our constituents. So you know, you want to really innovate new ways to serve people, meet the material needs, let's invest in community land trusts, let's have discussions about that, or let's have discussions about worker owned cooperatives that we could put in the more economically disenfranchised areas and what value that could actually bring to those communities in lieu of surveillance.

Brittany Battle (she/her): Y'all I want to, as we as we kind of like continue to shape this conversation about what's happening here locally- I want to give this quote from Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts. So he wrote this um opinion for the for the majority 2018 ruling in Carpenter v the United States, which was a ruling about warrantless search and seizure. So he says a person does not surrender all fourth amendment protection by venturing into the public sphere. And so he's saying that the ability to secretly monitor and catalog and surveil and track what folks are doing, right, that should not be the thing, right, because we're moving into a public space. And so we're pointing out right it's really important for us to understand- if we start having these public cameras, right, and also utilizing private cameras, right, from private citizens- these are going to be on individuals homes, right, but then there's no stopping them from monitoring churches, places of worship, right, from monitoring health clinics, doctor's office, community centers, school's- and the technology is endless. Y'all know that they can track your face wherever you go. So they can be tracking individuals throughout every step of their life, right, and no protections for any of the interactions that you have on a day-to-day basis where you choose to worship, who you choose to be around, right, where you choose to get medical attention- any of those things. So as Jillian pointed out, this is an extremely slippery slope- this is an extremely slippery slope. And one of the things that's important is that they're pulling on our conscious, right, saying this is going to help folks that have dementia if they go missing, this is going to help children in abduction cases, right, the way that these types of claims are made are literally textbook rhetorical strategies for propaganda, right, and in this particular case copaganda, right to get you to say 'hey, I don't want kids to be kidnapped so of course, then I have to be on board with a drone' right? And that's not the dichotomy that we have, right, that's not the binary- there's not this is not either or um option. Do other folks have anything they want to jump in and say about some of the other technology that's being used or this technology that we're talking about here in the city?

Bailey Pittenger (she/her): Yeah, I kind of want to speak a little bit about the progression of our local city and policing surveillance. So the first like drones that we actually had were FCSO-

Bailey Pittenger (she/her): drones back in 2019 and then grants such as JAG (which Brittany mentioned before) actually funded things like the Real-Time Intelligence Center (RTIC), the Real Time Crime Center (RTCC) which is an interlocal agreement between WSPD and FCSO- it's a shared system, so they're sharing their data but they have different employees. Then earlier this year, I think January was when we got the equipment and WSPD got the equipment called shot spotter system, which tracks the sound of gunshots supposedly- and so what we got to hear in the city council meetings on that is that this would only cover three mile radius, which is two percent of winston-salem total, the cost is, I believe over half a million just to get it set up, and they haven't revealed where they're going to locate it yet but initially it was going to be located in East Winston. With the drones, we've only learned about the drones through a public safety committee meeting. This was funded by the Winston Salem Police Department Foundation which is a non-profit. The cost of the four initial drones was a total of eighteen thousand dollars, but that doesn't include costs of training (like Jillian mentioned) and what's interesting too is that those drones were actually purchased from a company called TASER International, which is part of the Axon company. So Axon is actually a sponsor of the same training programs that train WSPD and FCSO. So you're seeing like the equipment being purchased from the same kind of training realm, so it's a circular cycle of like how this money actually feeds back into the PIC and the Surveillance Industrial Complex. So when we see things like the focus on PR campaigns, it's also part of the training that is sponsored by the same equipment program- so this is all part of what policing is all about- it's not about safety, it's just this whole program to sustain profit.

Brittany Battle (she/her): Jillian, can you speak quickly just before we shift to talking about some of the legacies of this surveillance use of surveillance and militarization of police- can you speak specifically about the ways that our city council here is truly invested in the use of public relations around these initiatives?

Jillian Sechrest (she/her): Oh absolutely. Our city leadership, in general, is driven solely by optics, um it's all about appearing to have an investment within the community. And as we heard on Monday during the public safety comments, Councilmember Mundy had a very, very long statement regarding how PR needs to be driven by the the actual city or the county, excuse me, city, I apologize, in lieu of the community or the advocates or the folks that might stir up some trouble. So, Councilmember Mundy did say that he's very in favor, that he agrees, and that he wants to stay ahead of the technology curve instead of chasing it. So that is what they're going with, as we saw then mentioned by Councilmember Taylor, is that we need to stay ahead of the technology, um and again he goes on to say and we need to have a PR story. So we are willing to continue to invest in the optics of how we can make surveillance be sold as public safety in lieu of addressing the core material needs and meeting that base of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which would alleviate a substantial amount of human suffering-

Jillian Sechrest (she/her): but instead, we're going to focus on optics.

Brittany Battle (she/her): That's right, I mean it's horrifying. It's horrifying and the fact that they just do this so blatantly, that they have this conversation so blatantly that this is about a narrative, right, this is not about evaluating whether or not these strategies are actually harmful, this is about creating a narrative that can get people on board and set up, like I think Jillain mentioned, a shady way to get you to consent to things that are actually harmful to you. Terrence, can you speak some about the legacy that all of these things have in surveilling Black and brown communities um since you know the inception of these United States?

Terrence (he/him): Absolutely. Can y'all hear me okay? I had to switch devices. Okay cool. So when we think about surveillance and just trace the history of Black people in what is now the United States, we have been hyper surveilled from the moment our feet touched the shores of the americas. Hyper surveilled. You could make the case that what we generally call plantations um were in essence, open-air prisons, they were in essence spaces where the movements, even the thought life, the speech, the cultural practices of African people were under constant surveillance. I mean, the surveillance was so all-encompassing that they didn't even feel comfortable with Black people on plantations having worship gatherings outside of the gaze of an enslaver. And so, when we think about surveillance today, it's really just the afterlife of enslavement which demanded that Black people remain at the bottom of this this empire, which demanded um that the labor of Black people be extracted, which demanded that um we not have self-determination, which demanded that there would be interference in all areas of our lives, from family to I mean you name it, all areas of Black life from enslavement to the era of Jim Crow Senior, to what some of us would call Jim and Jane Crow uh junior our era, has always been about surveilling, about monitoring, about curtailing, about um quarantining if you will um Black life, brown life, and all so many other forms of ways of being in the interest of those who are the ruling elite, in the interest of those who want to keep alive this deadly status quo. And so it's always important that we realize, as James Baldwin often put it, that we are trapped in a history and a history is trapped in us, there's always a dot that can be connected. I think it was Mark Twain who said (and I don't quote Twain often) but he said, history doesn't repeat itself, but it rhymes with itself, right. And so this surveillance is a rhyme with a long history of Black people, brown people, and other folks just being surveilled, monitored for maintaining a deadly status quo that they were relegated to be at the bottom of.

Brittany Battle (she/her): And it's so important for us to not just look at the ways that these things are happening in this country, right, we have to be able to make connections to the imperialist projects that are happening all over the globe and have been happening for hundreds of years. Right? And this is directly connected to the Military Industrial Complex-

Brittany Battle (she/her): So Jillian, can you speak some to how these types of surveillance and technologies are connected to this larger project?

Jillian Sechrest (she/her): Um absolutely, so I think as we all know the United States Military has a fairly large presence um across the globe. I believe last count it was over 800 bases, strategically placed globally. So, the Military Industrial Complex is a bear. It's massive. It has tentacles that go everywhere and it's interconnected as we have just been talking about with situations of surveillance. One of the ways in which we see this almost perverse relationship is within what they call the U.S. Pentagon 1033 Program. The 1033 program allows law enforcement agencies to essentially request Department of Defense technology. The only cost that is associated with it is for shipping and maintenance. So we are talking about high-grade weapons that are being sent to local police departments and that are in our local communities. So it first arose under George H. W. Bush um with the NDAA, that is going to be the National Defense Authorization bill that gets voted on each year, and um George H. W. Bush approved this first 1033 process back in 1990 for the 91 year, it actually allowed only a certain amount of equipment to be utilized in drug enforcement. So, we know that ties into the Prison Industrial Complex. So whenever Clinton came into office, you think that usually, you know, they try to say if you're more you're more progressive, if you're a democrat- well he actually expanded the program in 97. So in 1997 it opened up what this 1033 program could access and why. So as of 2020 there are now 8,200 police departments that utilize this and as of 2020 also, we've now seen 5.1 billion dollars in military material transferred from the DOD to the law enforcements, and that's since 97, so since Clinton expanded it further. So how does this kind of tie in? Again, I'm probably going to sound like a broken record because continued increase in defense spending- they get the money, they get you know get the materials, the contractors are coming in, we're going to constantly see that budget raised because of those special interests and then also too the military is gonna always ask for it. So they get the money that they want, you're gonna have more surplus that comes off of that from those contractors because that's who they're gonna pay because that's who keeps our officials elected. They're gonna pay that money and then we're going to see more hardware in our communities, we're going to see continued militarization of those police departments, so they're going to be more aggressive. It's been shown that that aggression escalates, so when folks have higher grade weaponry, they're going to be more on edge essentially and waiting for things to escalate so it's like a combat situation instead of being a protection. Um, that's going to exacerbate, we'll see where that exacerbates poverty because there's going to be more spending continuing to stratify and balloon to our defense department, we're going to see more like diminishing funds being sent to our actual social safety nets, and then it's going to exacerbate poverties. So now you have more police, more militarization-

Brittany Battle (she/her): Uh oh, I think Jillian's gotta be frozen, but what she's saying is so important right for us to really understand. As I said in the beginning, none of these things are happening in a vacuum, right. We have to be able to understand the connections between what's happening with our local police and what's happening at a national level. One thing that's super important (as Jillian pointed out) this 1033 program, I have some colleagues who are sociologists, who are studying- they've actually requested these documents from the Pentagon- and what's amazing because Jillian pointed out, over 8,000 police departments have utilized this program. Many of us just assume that these things are happening in big places, right, like oh this is just New York City, this is just Chicago, these are just like you know places where homicide rates are high right? But no, these are rural police departments that are getting military-grade weapons for what? Because they want to play with them. They don't get a military-grade weapon without wanting to use it and the bodies that they're going to use it on are going to be Black and brown bodies, queer bodies, right, undocumented bodies- they're going to be bodies of folks that have been historically and persistently oppressed by carcerality since the beginning as Terrence pointed out. Jillian, did you want to jump back in and finish your thoughts?

Jillian Sechrest (she/her): The last thing was just to close it is essentially it's just like you had said, its imperialism comes home. We talk about going to other countries and democratizing them, well the irony of that is when you talk about you know chickens coming home to roost and now we're seeing democratization being quelled in communities by a militarized force.

Brittany Battle (she/her): That's right. That's right. Bailey, can you speak to this concept known as Mission Creep and kind of explain what that means for local police departments and police agencies and how funding gets um set on a pathway to just balloon police budgets?

Bailey Pittenger (she/her): Yes, um so we've kind of touched on this throughout but this idea of like we'll be told like we're getting drones, we're told we get a shot spotter system, were told we get real-time crime center (RTCC), real-time intelligence center, (RTIC) and that's all we get to hear- and then the PR strategy is just to keep it at that and try to convince community that it does build safety for us. The reality behind it that not only does it decrease safety and you know balloon into effects that will exacerbate poverty but these financial commitments are are termed as what's called Mission Creep because although we buy a piece of equipment, such as building a real-time crime center, it requires the police departments and deputy departments to then find more employees to man these units. And so an example of that is with the real-time intelligence center, FCSO has had to hire or get contract data researchers. And so we're seeing policing turn into data researching, like we're seeing policing shift and actually just balloon into different kinds of jobs to match the changes in technology. So that's the concept of Mission-

Bailey Pittenger (she/her): Creep, but it really does come down to, although we're told one thing, the long-term commitments of these initiatives is something that we can't even predict ourselves because it will continue to adapt and it will cost us a ton of money. Like we're already seeing at this time, WSPD and FCSO budgets continue to increase even though our general fund for both county and city has decreased. So, and that's terrifying too with the effects of the pandemic on the economy. Um so I will also say that the RTIC and the RTCC are both under contract with the JAG grant until 2023- um so that's an example of like are our taxpayer dollars going to continue to sustain this program or what happens next, we can't tell, but that's something that's um definitely related to mission creep and could result in a ballooning effect and where our budget goes.

Brittany Battle (she/her): And y'all, I mean this seems so basic but this has to be said, right. When police departments are entering into long-term contracts that's because they don't expect to reduce crime- you don't need to enter into a long-term scenario if you expect for the thing to work, right? So WSPD and Forsyth Sheriff's Office have a 10-year lease on a building that they're using as a warehouse, right. Why do you need a 10-year lease if what you're doing is going to work? Why does it take 10 years to work right? It's very important for you to think about that, right. Do police have an incentive to completely end crime? No, because then they don't have jobs, right, then that institution does not exist. I mean, it's pretty you know, that's pretty like standard, right? So, just quickly to wrap up, can we just like point to some of the impact, I mean we've talked about this um you know implicitly and explicitly throughout this conversation but let's kind of just like point directly at some of the implications of the use of these technologies and the militarization of the police. Anybody want to jump in on that?

Jillian Sechrest (she/her): I would jump in just with the surveillance piece to point out what some of the fallout is for that because the more you surveil, the more power you basically would be assuming over somebody. So Michel Foucault said that-

Brittany Battle (she/her): Jillian froze again, but I know Jillian was going to give us this good Foucault point about the panopticon, right. And so the panopticon is this idea that originated talking about prisons, right, that you could just have someone who is stationed at one point that at any given time could look anywhere in the prison, right. And so they don't even necessarily need to be watching at all times but it's the threat that someone could be watching you at all times that makes you feel like you have to comport yourself. Jillian do you want to jump in? Sorry I was taking up your point.

Jillian Sechrest (she/her): Oh no, that's I mean that's exactly it. So it's you're breeding a sense of insecurity and and fear into people which you have to think about the long-term-

Jillian Sechrest (she/her): ramifications where it's basically creating a passive constituency- so folks are going to be used to being surveilled, you're going to be more inclined to essentially release some more of those civil liberties over. And I mean I know, I'm not trying to sound like a conspiracy theorist on my end but you know I'm approaching this more from a philosophical and psychological standpoint. You know there is a general threat to liberty and to humanity and just people's sense of security by having excessive monitoring.

Brittany Battle (she/her): I have my students do an activity, at all of the different institutions where I've taught, where they go on a scavenger hunt one day and I have them walk across campus and identify all of the cameras that they can find. And everyone is always shocked by how many cameras are just pointed on them at all times, right, that this has just become something that's so taken for granted, so normal, right, that we don't even pay attention to all the ways that we're being surveilled. Right and for us to understand do those things actually keep us safe, right? Like are they actually stopping people from doing anything, right? And if evidence has shown us around either the shooting technology, right, that tracks the shooting- we know that that doesn't work, right, um we know that those things are going to work to increase mass incarceration. That's what we do know, right? If there's anything that we know for certain that those things are going to lock up more people for non-violent offenses and which destabilizes communities, right, which which increases oppression and inequality and poverty and all of those things that if we could just try to address on the front end y'all, right, this is what we're really asking for- we're trying to address these things on the front end so that everyone can have access to not just a place to live but a decent place to live, right, so that people can have access to living wages, can have access to health care, can have access to education, can have access to the fullness of life that we're all entitled to right? And so that's what that's what this call um is really about. So we have a couple things that we want to just like call y'all to action on. Some of these things are directly related to the things that we've talked about today and some of the things are related to other things that are happening statewide because it's important that we understand what's going on um and what's impacting our community. So Terrence, quickly can you just speak to the call to action for folks to kind of get behind?

Terrence (he/him): Absolutely, our first call to action is for folks to mark out five minutes to call, 5-10 minutes, to call local officials local, city, county, leadership, and demand that they stop the expansion of all of this surveillance. So we're calling local officials and saying, 'hey, as a community member, as a citizen, I demand that you stop the expansion of this surveillance policing because at the end of the day it's not really keeping any of us any more safe than we already are'.

Brittany Battle (she/her): Um Bailey, can you speak to what we're asking folks to do around the new COVID relief funding that the city is getting?

Bailey Pittenger (she/her): Right, so it was recently announced that the city and the county will get a collective of almost 130 million dollars of COVID relief funding and they've yet to decide where they're spending this. And so we're also asking that while you're calling your local representatives, both county and city, ask that they not spend this COVID money, COVID relief money on public safety. We did see last year COVID relief money go into different forms of equipment but also merit raises for public safety already when they're being paid quite a bunch. So just go ahead and ask them not to put our COVID relief money into more public safety funds.

Brittany Battle (she/her): And y'all, it's important, public safety is the budget line, right, we do actually want them to invest in real public safety, what we don't want them to invest in is policing, right. And so it's important, we call it public safety because we're so in the weeds with looking at the budgets and that's how it's defined in the budget, right, but if they were going to invest in things that were actually going to keep us safe, we'd be behind that. What we're not behind is increasing surveillance technology as Terrence just pointed. Um Bailey, can you also speak to this uh the House Bill 311 that we need some folks to take some action on that as well?

Bailey Pittenger (she/her): Right so House Bill 311 is the Safe Roads and Communities Act. We're asking to call your representative and request yes on this house bill. This would, actually Jillian could you step in and help me with this one?

Jillian Sechrest (she/her): Absolutely, so House Bill 311 is basically going to be, it's titled the Safer Roads and Communities Act of 2021. This was introduced by a representative from the 63rd, he's actually out of Advance, let me grab his name really quick. Um, but he essentially proposed this to provide a little bit more safety for folks that are quote on quote undocumented living within North Carolina. So more or less they could be able to kind of drive without fear, like get their kids to school, do anything along those lines and there is a stipulation within that bill that does essentially gird them from any kind of interference from any immigration or law enforcement officers trying to understand their quote on quote status. So this is how you can essentially support that- is get a hold of your house rep, that is your state house representative, so you can go to that ncleg.gov website and actually pull up like find your legislator whose over your district. So that is super important but reach out to them and request that they do vote yes on this house bill.

Brittany Battle (she/her): Jillian, can you also speak to House Bill 168?

Jillian Sechrest (she/her): Absolutely, so House Bill 168, unsure if y'all might know this but back in 2020, there was this thing uh U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)- they had a block grant and after basically administrative costs were held North Carolina got 117 million dollars in rental and utility assistance. That's under what's called the Hope Program. So it is all to basically aid folks that were impacted by COVID 19 facing utility shut off or facing um eviction. Applications were opened in October and closed in one month. That is how high the demand was for assistance. Only 30 percent of applicants have received those funds by February 22nd of this year. So what happens is there tends to be, you will still get evicted. So even if you get that letter and you're still not getting those funds, your landlord can still move forward and find alternate ways to evict you to include classing you as a holdover just because you are awaiting those funds. So we've seen that and you know that the big problem with it is the way that they actually allocated the funding. So there's going to be additional money that is coming down from this latest um aid package and it's going to be to the tune of 546 million dollars and that money in Hope could provide a lot of assistance for folks that desperately need it but the bill fails to address um the expediency needed to execute the program. Again 30% by February 22nd. So they're basically pushing to listen to the ncorr, that is an organization that oversees that would administer the funds, they only basically gave them five percent towards staffing which is not going to be sufficient. They want, the ncorr is petitioning essentially to only provide aid to more rural communities that might not have the infrastructure and support instead of having ncorr, like just handle all rural areas and municipalities because some of the municipalities can administer the funds themselves. So ncorr is you know a little overwhelmed with that and so they're requesting that uh you've signed this petition, uh again that is case sensitive so heads up about that. Sign the petition um to request Governor Cooper vetoes the 2021 COVID 19 bill so the aid isn't substantial enough, it's not going to be able to be delivered, this is going to impact the most economically impacted amongst us, which we know already, Black and brown communities, queer communities, folks that are really hurting right now and we need to make sure that they get the aid that they need. So yeah, fill out that petition, request Governor Cooper um vetoes House Bill 168. That was long, I apologize.

Brittany Battle (she/her): Jillian, can you read out the URL so we can discern whether these are capital i's or lowercase l's after the three? Or maybe we can drop it in the chat- we'll drop it in the comments so that y'all can click on it there. Perfect thanks, and so the last uh thing that we want to let y'all know about is to join us um uh the Forsyth County Police Accountability and Reallocation Coalition is putting on a virtual teach-in on Monday, March 29th at 6 00 p.m. And so this teaching is around journeying towards liberation, we're going to be talking about how abolition is a Black radical feminist practice, right, and so if you're feminist, if your feminism is not decarceral and abolitionist, we need y'all to jump on here, right, to understand how um the carceral state is a site um is an anti-feminist site right. And so we'll have a lot of um really-

Brittany Battle (she/her): amazing people talking about a lot of different topics, there's going to be art incorporated, so we're really looking forward to that. We'll drop the registration link if you would like to join us um on the webinar, on the zoom webinar, you can register with the link that will drop into the facebook comments or you can watch us we'll be live streaming it on Triad Abolition Project facebook live. And so as always, we appreciate you all taking the time um out of your day on a Sunday to get informed or if you're watching this later on to get informed about things that are happening and we really encourage y'all as Terrence said, take five minutes out of your day to to take some action on one of these things that we told you all about. Um and just in closing, I just want to say that we are in solidarity uh with the folks who have been impacted directly and indirectly with the violence that's happening in or that happened in Atlanta um with the folks who are murdered in the massage parlors, we stand in solidarity with sex workers, we stay in solidarity with the Asian and Asian American community, we know that if some of us are not free that none of us are free, and so we have to make sure that we're thinking about ways to um to stay in solidarity. So we thank you all we'll see y'all again soon. Take care.