

Increased use of license plate readers sparks privacy worries



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When Anne Arundel County Police announced in August that their crime rates had dropped since the beginning of the year, they attributed it in part to the technology at their fingertips, including automated license plate readers.

Police departments across Maryland and the country have employed these cameras in the past few decades to assist in investigating traffic violations, finding stolen vehicles and locating missing people. But experts and critics alike warn that, as they grow in use, these license plate readers could be more of a cause for concern than a solution.

David Jaros, a professor of law at the University of Baltimore, said this issue has become “increasingly complicated” in recent years.

“As technology has become more sophisticated, the ability of the government to track our movements has started to raise really important privacy issues,” he said.

What are automated license plate readers?

Automated license plate readers consist of high-speed cameras and computers that are able to take the data from images of vehicles and compare them against a database of images.

Automated license plate readers on West Street near Riva Road in the Annapolis area. (Paul W. Gillespie/Staff)

Jaros, who is also faculty director of the school’s Center for Criminal Justice Reform, said the cameras can be in fixed positions, on mobile units or affixed to police vehicles.

“So that as the police are going through a neighborhood or driving on a highway, they are constantly recording the license plates of cars that go by them,” he said.

The data from these images, including time and location, is stored on a server, Jaros said.

According to the Maryland Coordination and Analysis Center’s 2025 audit report on license plate readers in the state, 20 law enforcement agencies in