



Testimony of Cynthia Conti-Cook, Director of Research and Policy
Collaborative Research Center for Resilience

Written testimony submitted via portal and email on October 7, 2026
Regarding the Whole of Council Hearing on AI, October 5, 2026

More than ten years ago, civil and human rights advocates across NYC organizations and communities warned city government that emerging automated decision-making technologies threatened a variety of harms to individual New Yorkers and the cohesion of New York City families and communities.

Legislation was eventually passed in 2017 requiring a task force to study and create a list of recommendations for government use of “automated decision systems” (ADS). These were precursors to the types of machine learning systems the tech industry (and now most everyone) calls artificial intelligence or “AI”. A timeline of this task force and its work is documented in a shadow report led by the current Mayor’s Senior Advisor on Technology Rashida Richardson, “Confronting Black Boxes: A Shadow Report of the New York City Automated Decision System Task Force,” published in 2019.¹ It included an inventory of concerns that many New York City advocates shared then regarding how emerging technologies introduced foreseeable and serious threats of widespread harms to New Yorkers, their families and communities. Most of these harms related to the disruption of critical government safety net services and the exposure of communities subjected to surveillance systems that scrutinized every aspect of their lives for profit or punishment.

Over the past three years, I have testified alongside many other advocates at multiple technology, contracts, public safety, civil rights and workers’ rights hearings at City Council to raise awareness among elected officials, government workers, and members of Council about the many foreseeable threats that new surveillance technologies like AI are introducing.² Many more people have testified in public hearings in many other jurisdictions, flagging the same harms. Government agencies are currently also documenting these harms.³ Investigative journalists have documented and reported these harmful patterns as well. Numerous reports from nonprofit and grassroots organizations around the world, across the country and the city already document the many ways that people are harmed, families and communities are separated, and human and civil rights are violated by deployment of new industrial technologies.

This City Council has already, for example, heard from attorneys from other jurisdictions (Arkansas and Michigan) who have litigated cases against government implementation of technologies that violate administrative, procedural, and substantive due process

¹ Rashida Richardson, ed., “Confronting Black Boxes: A Shadow Report of the New York City Automated Decision System Task Force,” AI Now Institute, December 4, 2019.

² These testimonies are published with the materials from City Council hearings and on our website: <https://thecrcr.org/public-infrastructure-technology-and-democracy/#hearings>

³ Many experts on injustice and other potential harms, myself included, have outlined the threats to city workers and the quality of government services to researchers in city government assembling a report pursuant to New York City Council Intro. 1066. This bill requires a task force to “assess the impacts of algorithmic tools and automated decision systems (ADS) on the administration of the civil service. Such assessment would include the impacts of algorithmic tools and ADS on how civil service employees are hired, how job functions have been impacted, and what feedback has been received from employees.”

rights.⁴ Our communities are burdened three times through the process of procuring and deploying technology that disrupts government functions and violates constitutional rights: (1) our tax dollars pay the vendor and not long-term government staff whose knowledge, relationships, and skillset remains in service of the public; (2) tax payers don't get the quality of safety net services that they need, relying on faith, philanthropy and neighborhood funding and labor to fill the gaps; and (3) our tax dollars pay for the lawsuits brought on behalf of people wronged by government services for massive violations of federal, state, and local legal protections.

The City is also already on notice that the public's data is at risk, despite the decades of Executive Orders and data privacy laws that demonstrate how New Yorkers' expectations of privacy have expanded as the amount of surveillance equipment they are surrounded by expands. Government workers across the country have already warned pilot project vendors and their governments' executive administrations that the public's personally identifiable information (PII) as well as their own employee information could be exposed to industrial intelligence gathering systems.

In a nutshell, these testimonies, reports, and investigative journalism has put the City government on notice that it introduces new harms, legal risks, and potential liability by deploying AI in the public sector and by allowing it to operate in our City. It invites a multiplicity of harms, data breaches, unlawful behavior, and constitutional violations that have been documented in detail for over a decade by a diverse set of advocates across the city, country and around the world.

⁴ The summary of advocacy testimony following the MyCity hearing, Sept 30, 2024, compiled by CRRCR (fka Surveillance Resistance Lab), is available here: <https://thecrcr.org/wp-content/uploads/Four-Major-Risks-of-MyCity.pdf>