Groups call on Chicago mayor to ban city's use of facial recognition technology

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Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot should ban the city's use of facial recognition technology of the kind the Chicago Police Department utilizes on the grounds it's racially biased and an invasion of residents'

privacy, a group of activists said Tuesday.

The groups want to halt the department's new contract to use technology developed by Clearview AI. The program compares images of unknown suspects with a database of 3 billion images culled from websites. The Chicago Sun-Times reported last week on the deal.

"While we do think that public safety is a big concern, we also think that there's a huge public safety concern in not collecting massive amounts of information on everyone in the city," said Freddy Martinez, executive director of Lucy Parsons Labs.

Speaking at a City Hall news conference, Martinez said city officials haven't provided any guidelines on exactly how they are using the data. And he pointed to studies that have shown facial recognition technology tends to more frequently misidentify some minority groups than it does white people.

"While the city can make all sorts of arguments about how they're using this technology, internally and externally they haven't even released any kind of use policy, there's no kind of evidentiary standards for use of facial recognition technology," Martinez said.

And Muhammad Sankari of the Arab American Action Network said the city hasn't earned the benefit of the doubt. "There's a long history in this city of criminalizing communities based on shoddy information," he said.

Martinez said groups are working with aldermen to possibly introduce an ordinance to outlaw the technology.

Lightfoot released a statement Tuesday defending the Police Department's use of the technology, saying investigators only use it to

compare mugshots with the "public source information" culled from the internet. The internet database is not used to try to identify images captured "in a live or real-time environment" like closed-circuit cameras that are part of the Police Department's citywide camera network, the mayor said.

"The CPD uses a facial matching tool to sort through its mugshot database and public source information in the course of an investigation triggered by an incident or crime, allowing the department to speed up the sorting of thousands of mugshot photos when there is a possible comparator image," Lightfoot's statement reads in part.

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