

**TESTIMONY OF TRENT SHORES,
FORMER UNITED STATES ATTORNEY, NORTHERN DISTRICT OF OKLAHOMA**

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee -

Thank you for the opportunity to attend and present today. It's an honor to be here not only as a former United States Attorney but also as an Oklahoman who cares deeply about public safety in our great state.

Background

I'm pleased to stand alongside law enforcement today to ensure the selfless and heroic Oklahomans who took an oath to serve and protect our families and neighborhoods have access to the 21st century tools they need to keep our communities safe.

My testimony today is informed by nearly two decades of collaborative work with federal, state, and tribal law enforcement officials. In September 2017, I was sworn in as United States Attorney for the Northern District of Oklahoma, where it was the honor of my lifetime to serve as the chief federal law enforcement officer responsible for all federal criminal prosecutions and civil litigation in the Northern District of Oklahoma, an area covering eleven counties and thirteen federally recognized Indian tribes. Prior to my appointment, I served for ten years as an Assistant United States Attorney where I prosecuted human trafficking, child exploitation, and international organized crime in this state. I served on the Attorney General's Advisory Committee at the appointment of both Attorneys General Jeff Sessions and William Barr, providing counsel on key policy matters for the Department of Justice, including the prosecution of domestic violence, and I also served as the Chair of the Attorney General's Advisory Subcommittee on Native American Issues, where I guided the development of national policy for Indian Country justice.

In sum, I have had the privilege of working with and leading teams of law enforcement and justice officials who are deeply committed to furthering the public safety of all Oklahomans.

Challenges Faced by Oklahoma Law Enforcement

Too often, law enforcement lack the evidentiary resources they need to address the most pressing and significant threats facing our community. I have witnessed these challenges first-hand.

According to the [FBI Uniform Crime Reporting \(UCR\) Program](#) data, in 2022, 64 percent of violent crimes reported to police in Oklahoma went unsolved. This is 7 percentage points higher

than the unsolved rate in 2012. In the same year, 40 percent of the homicides committed in Oklahoma went unsolved, along with 85 percent of reported rape cases, and 71 percent of robberies.

As part of this statewide and national reality - American Indian and Alaska Native communities experience disproportionate rates of missing and murdered persons, particularly among women and girls.

[“Statistics show](#) us that approximately 1,500 American Indian and Alaska Native missing persons have been entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) throughout the U.S. and approximately 2,700 cases of Murder and Nonnegligent Homicide Offenses have been reported under the UCR Program. In total, the Bureau of Indian Affairs estimates there are approximately 4,200 missing and murdered cases that have gone unsolved. These investigations often remain unsolved due to a lack of investigative resources.

Law enforcement officials understand this dynamic is too commonplace in modern day policing. A low solve rate for serious crimes in America may be indicative of a service delivery gap. It means many criminals evade accountability for the harms they perpetuate. It means too many crime victims and their families are left without justice and closure.

Need for Investigative Resources

During my tenure as a United States Attorney, I focused on bringing every resource to bear as part of our fight against crime. In a nation such as ours, where the safety of our citizens is paramount, we should not stand idle while criminal predators corrode our communities.

Put simply, we can do more.

[Research is clear](#) that the best way to reduce crime is to solve it and hold accountable those who perpetrated it.

In turn, we must ensure the men and women responsible for conducting investigations and prosecuting criminal defendants have access to the resources they need to build cases against criminal defendants, including public safety tools like License Plate Recognition (LPR) cameras. As any detective will tell you, a license plate serves as one of the most valuable pieces of evidence available to law enforcement when pursuing a lead for a suspect.

LPRs have become a valuable tool for law enforcement agencies across the country, in Oklahoma, and for law enforcement agencies in the Northern District of Oklahoma.

These automated systems use cameras to snap images of license plates and compare them to databases like the NCIC. When a license plate associated with one of the 1,500 American Indian and Alaska Native missing persons cases entered into NCIC passes a LPR camera, whether in downtown Oklahoma City or a rural county 3,000 miles away - the nearest law enforcement agency will receive an alert helping facilitate the arrest of a suspect, which also hopefully means the safe recovery of the victim. With the presence of LPRs, investigators can understand what vehicles were at the scene when a crime occurs, and better disrupt the trafficking networks responsible for perpetuating the missing persons crisis in our country.

This technology has been endorsed by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) due to how effective it is in helping safely recover missing and kidnapped persons. It has been used several times to that effect right here in our state.

When combined with good, dedicated police work and strong public policy - these kinds of technologies can help us send a clear message to potential criminals: Oklahoma will not be their safe haven when they choose to break our laws.

U.S. Case Law

The case law surrounding the use of LPR cameras in the United States is clear. Courts have consistently found no expectation of privacy vis a vis a license plate. As a Kansas appellate court judge recently put it: “A license plate is made to be seen by all who care to look. No one has an expectation of privacy of their vehicle’s license plate number.”¹

As has already been noted here today, State appellate courts and/or federal district courts in at least fourteen states, as well as the 9th and 11th circuits, have found that the use of LPRs does not violate the Constitution.

Closing Remarks

I’ll end with this - when law enforcement officials tell us that a particular investigative tool works, we should listen to them and figure out how to get that tool into their toolbox. To that end, it is important the State of Oklahoma protects its citizens by facilitating the ethical deployment of 21st century policing technologies. In short, we must provide law enforcement with the resources they need to push back the criminal current in Oklahoma and investigate crimes committed against our fellow citizens.

¹*Junction City Police Dep’t v. \$454,280 U.S. Currency*, 531 P.3d 539 (Kan. Ct. App. 2023), review denied (Feb. 22, 2024)).

In sum, I encourage this Committee to thoughtfully consider how LPRs can further public safety by enhancing law enforcement's abilities to responsibly investigate suspected criminal activity and pursue justice for crime victims.

Thank you very much for your time and all your dedication to the law enforcement community in Oklahoma.