In this day and age of advanced technology, society often has a love-hate relationship with many of the innovations not even envisioned 20 years ago. Take, for example, license plate readers (LPRs). Many citizens understand that LPRs can serve a legitimate, useful purpose when the scanned license plate alerts law enforcement to a car associated with a criminal act. However, others see LPR technology as a means for law enforcement to store millions of records about drivers and their vehicles. These factions see the tracking of vehicles through the use of LPRs as an invasion of privacy which can reveal, log and create a permanent record of drivers' daily actions and interactions. This mindset has led many states to draft or adopt laws and legislation designed to curb the use of LPR technology, including Texas.

On March 9, 2015, HB 2744 authored by Texas House Representative Giovanni Capriglione was introduced relating to the use of automatic license plate readers by law enforcement. The bill calls for the destruction of LPR images and data within 90 days of collection, unless useful as evidence in a criminal investigation or prosecution. On the heels of this legislation, HB 2867, authored by Texas House Representative Matt Rinaldi and also relating to LPR use by law enforcement, was introduced on March 10, 2015. The bill states that LPR data collected by law enforcement may only be used for the investigation of a criminal offense or missing person, and all data must be destroyed within seven days of collection unless useful as evidence in a criminal investigation or prosecution.

As of March 19, 2015, HB 2867 had only been referred to the House Homeland Security and Public Safety Committee, with no further action. However, on April 23, 2015, HB 2744 was recommended for placement with the House Committee on Local and Consent Calendars, which is a committee for bills to which no opposition is anticipated. The Texas legislative session ends in June, so these bills have until then to move forward or die.

For those states that have not begun targeting LPR usage, Texas legislative actions may serve as a foreshadowing of future events elsewhere. As law enforcement officers and representatives, it is imperative that we do everything possible to educate our government officials about the importance of LPR technology in vehicle crime investigations as well as emphasize that responsible law enforcement agencies maintain strict privacy policies ensuring that citizen and vehicle data is not typically shared. Without proactive interaction championing the cause of LPR usage, we may lose this vital resource in the vehicle crimes investigation arsenal.

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Editor's Note: Thanks to IAATI ATPA Committee Chair Reg Phillips for sending this in.