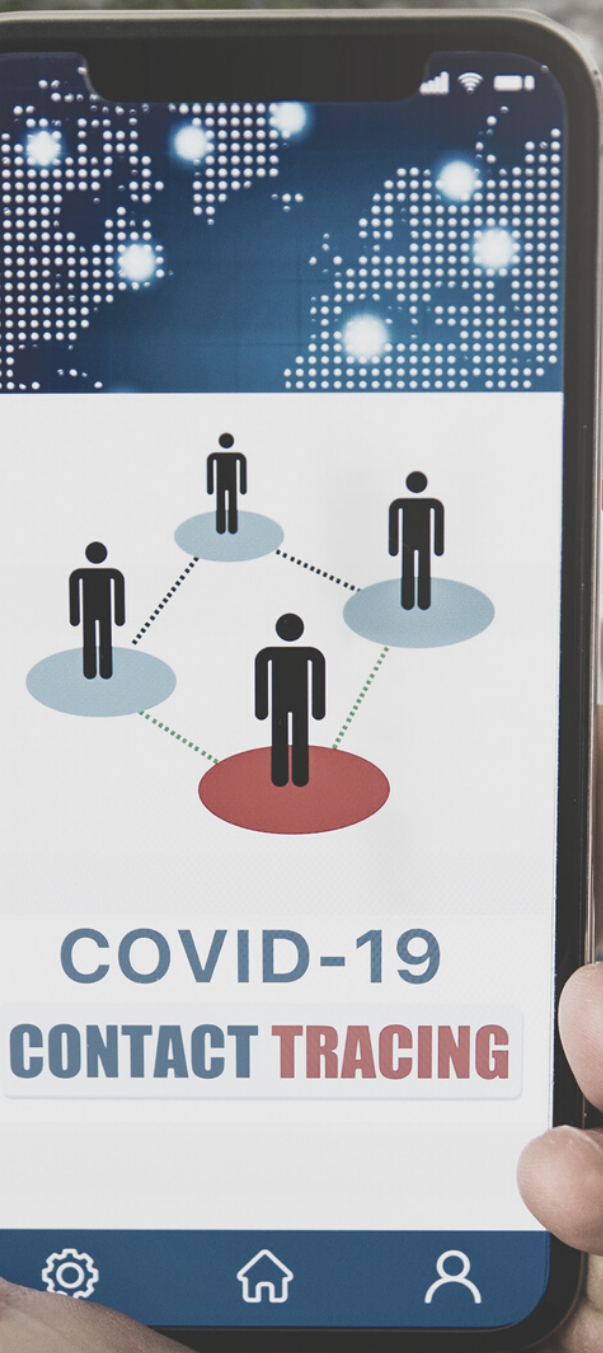


# STOP

SURVEILLANCE TECHNOLOGY  
OVERSIGHT PROJECT



ANNUAL REPORT

# 2020



## Letter from the Executive Director

Friends,

**This was a year unlike any other.** A year of heartbreak, grief, and separation. But even amid the historic tragedies and traumas of 2020, the work continued. And looking back now, I am proud beyond words at everything our team accomplished under the most trying of conditions.

In March 2020, [I sent a somber newsletter](#), letting our supporters know about my decision to close S.T.O.P.'s offices. I wrote:

History teaches us that moments of crisis are when the values of democracy are truly tested. These are the times when novel threats breathe new life into age-old bigotries, and civil rights watchdogs are needed most. I have no doubt that we'll do incredible work together in the coming weeks, ensuring that those in power remain accountable to the people they serve, and ensuring that this temporary tumult doesn't do permanent damage to the rule of law.

Sadly, at the time, I didn't know just how extreme that danger was, but S.T.O.P. still rose to it. As I write this, our offices are still shuttered, but our work has only grown. **Since last March, S.T.O.P. became a leading voice on surveillance in the COVID-19 era.** We published groundbreaking research on contact tracing apps, remote proctoring, and public health technologies. We fought for novel privacy protections, working with a broad coalition to pass the first contact tracing privacy law in the country here in New York.

And this fight is far from over. Police agencies have responded to the anxiety and uncertainty of the pandemic era with only more force and more surveillance. Silicon Valley continues to sell surveillance capitalism as a COVID-19 cure-all. The risks from the pandemic remain very real, but working together we know that we can continue to push back on tracking technologies that undermine public health and civil rights.

**With gratitude,  
Albert Fox Cahn, Esq.  
Executive Director**



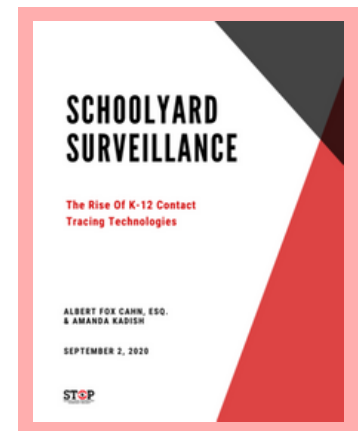
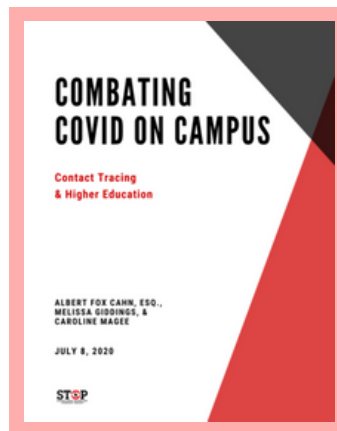


# COVID-19 Response

*Early in the pandemic, S.T.O.P. strategically repositioned our work to focus 50% of our time on analyzing the impact of COVID-19 surveillance.*

Fear often leads us to bad policies, and perhaps nothing inspired more fear in 2020 than the historic and deadly threat of COVID-19. Sadly, this global crisis was an opportunity for surveillance vendors to push untested and error-prone surveillance systems that detract from evidence-based public health measures. S.T.O.P. became a global leader in opposing new, discriminatory forms of hygiene theater, such as contact tracing apps, thermal imaging scanners, and vaccine passports.

**We produced several reports, including:**



We've also examined universities' COVID-19 responses in-depth, using S.T.O.P.'s privacy "scorecards" that analyze apps' privacy risks and equity concerns. We partnered with the Ethical Tech Initiative at Duke University to expand these scorecards to additional schools with the support of student volunteers.

S.T.O.P. and our coalition partners pushed New York State to enact bill [S08450-B / A10500-B](#), which requires contact tracing to be kept confidential and prevents law enforcement and immigration authorities from accessing contact tracing data. After applying pressure through the fall, Governor Cuomo signed this bill into law in late December.

We supported [S8448D / A10583](#) as well, which would go further in guaranteeing transparency from contact tracing apps by establishing individual rights for users, including the right to know what personal information is collected, processed, and disclosed, and for what reason. We worked with our national partners to push the adoption of these same contact tracing protections around the country.

**As the pandemic rages on, S.T.O.P. continues this urgent work**, including advocating against the rollout of "vaccine passports," or digital proof of vaccination, as another dangerous distraction from what needs to be done: community education and engagement, the only way to truly make vaccine distribution equitable and effective.

# Litigation

*In 2020, S.T.O.P. served survivors of surveillance abuse through impact litigation and direct legal services.*



For several years, we've pursued a lawsuit to end the NYPD policy of forcing arrestees to remove religious head coverings – including turbans, wigs, hats, and the hijab – for mugshots. Our plaintiffs included a survivor of domestic violence who was traumatized by the NYPD when she was forced to undress in front of male arrestees and officers. We brought a federal civil rights class-action suit against the department, and in November 2020, we **forced the NYPD to end this biased "hijab ban" policy**, which had long fueled its facial recognition database. We expect the settlement to be groundbreaking – both in the scope of religious liberties protected, and the limitations put on the NYPD's facial recognition database.

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Our open records litigation and research empower the public to understand complex surveillance systems. We sued city agencies for records four times in 2020:

- We pursued Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) litigation against the MTA over its installation of facial recognition technology at the Times Square / Port Authority subway station **and won**.
- We had two ongoing cases against the NYPD, including one to obtain information about its use of facial recognition in Times Square, and another about its use of a "sentiment meter" – dubious technology that tracks New Yorkers' opinions of the police on a block-by-block basis.
- In our final lawsuit, S.T.O.P. represents Upturn, a national privacy nonprofit. S.T.O.P. challenged the NYPD's refusal to provide records detailing its cellphone decryption tools, and **we have already secured a portion of the records Upturn sought**.



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S.T.O.P. has successfully compelled agencies to disclose previously hidden documents, for example revealing that the **NYPD used facial recognition technology more than 22,000 times** in the last three years. The information gathered through these cases bolsters S.T.O.P.'s current and future advocacy efforts.

## Legislation

*In 2020, S.T.O.P. became a force to be reckoned with. In addition to COVID-19 privacy bills, we expanded our grassroots base and engaged thousands in the privacy fight – many for the first time, in the wake of the police response to nationwide protests against systemic racism. And we did the impossible as a one-year-old organization: we took on the NYPD and won.*

In June, we saw the culmination of years of hard work as S.T.O.P. led a coalition of more than 100 organizations to enact the **Public Oversight of Surveillance Technology (POST) Act** – the first New York surveillance reform law in a generation. Under the POST Act, the NYPD must disclose every spy tool it uses, as well as how data is shared with federal officials.

The significance of the POST Act can't be overstated. **S.T.O.P. was founded, in large part, to make the POST Act a reality.** The transparency demanded by law is a crucial first step toward ending mass surveillance in New York, pulling back the curtain on decades of unchecked surveillance, and equipping advocates with the data needed to outlaw these tools. Passed little more than a year after S.T.O.P.'s launch, the POST Act has effectively laid the groundwork for our work for years to come. Ultimately, we will push for a civilian privacy commission similar to that of Oakland, California, with full powers to deny police spy tools. This is no small task, as it requires a revision to New York City's charter to effect.



Building on this momentum, we launched **Privacy NY**, a coalition of more than two dozen civil rights and community-based organizations fighting for privacy legislation. Together, we passed a statewide moratorium on facial recognition in K-12 schools, and we're pushing more than a dozen priority bills in New York City and State, including:

- Unofficial DNA Databases Ban (**A6124** & **S1347**)
- Bodycam Facial Recognition Ban (**S1076** & **A1601**)
- Police Drone Ban (**S675** & **A3311**)

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Lastly, S.T.O.P. worked with lawmakers to introduce **the first bill in the nation banning geo-location tracking.** These "reverse search warrants" allow police to work backward to find everyone who came near a crime scene – accessing data on thousands of people at once through their cell phones. Beyond only banning warrants, the bill would also be the first to address the issue of police purchasing data, closing a loophole that police departments and the military have used to surveil millions without any oversight from the courts.

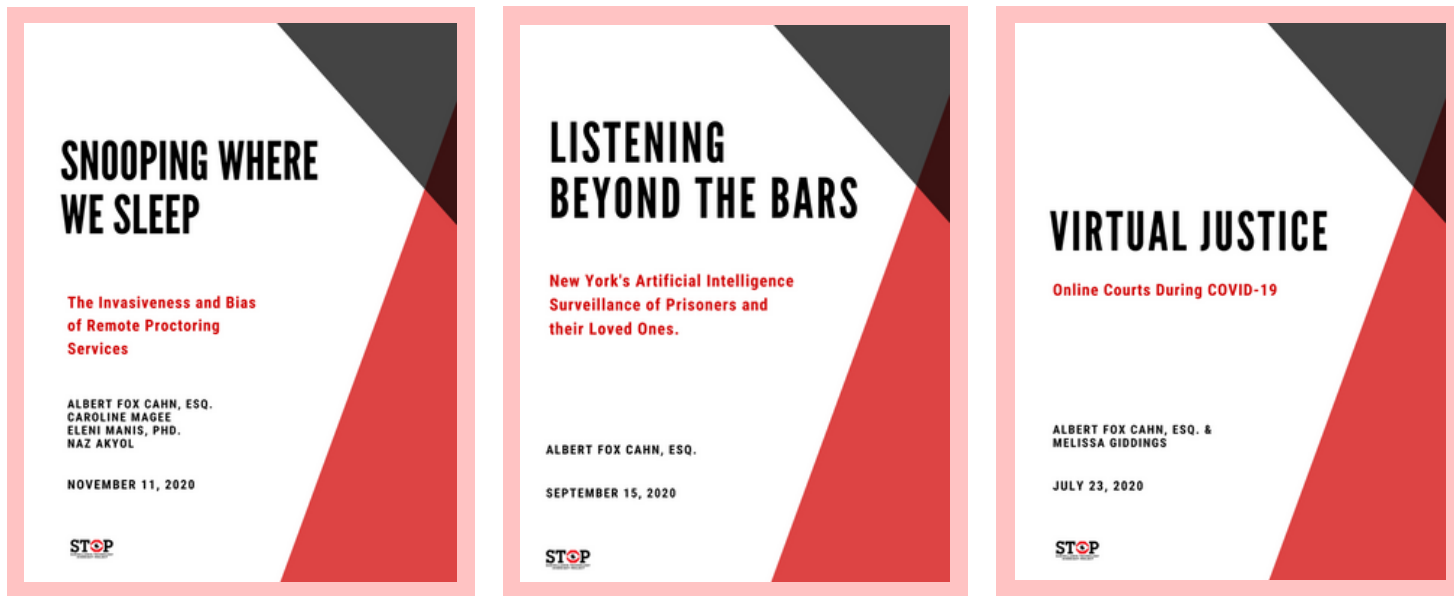
## Policy Research & Education

*S.T.O.P. shifted public understanding of surveillance through a multi-pronged approach.*

Through our research white papers, we analyze systems of surveillance technology, identify pressing and overlooked problems, and present best practices or recommendations for moving forward. **We published dozens of research papers and posts** on topics ranging from warrantless cellphones seizures to congestion pricing.

Beyond COVID-19, much of S.T.O.P.'s research focused on "Smart Cities" programs, the growth of which have skyrocketed in response to the pandemic and the need for remote technology.

**Our reports covered a wide variety of settings in which new "Smart" technologies are already causing harm to marginalized communities, such as:**



At our community education events, we provided crucial tools to New Yorkers. Our monthly S.T.O.P. x RadTech talk series brings together experts in privacy, law, and other fields to discuss the intersectional impact of discriminatory surveillance. Together with our partners across New York and the country, we held more than 70 events in 2020.

We offered privacy trainings tailored to the needs of communities, recognizing that when it comes to surveillance, **one size fits none**. Our community events included trainings for survivors of domestic violence in the Muslim, Arab, and South Asian (MASA) community, for sex workers, and other over-policed groups. For each of these highly specialized events, we designed the relevant curriculum and materials and partnered with a community-based organization with the cultural and linguistic competency to deliver the training. **In 2020 alone, we reached more than 5,000 New Yorkers.**

## Communications

*S.T.O.P. shaped the privacy debate through direct media engagement.*

S.T.O.P. authored more than 40 op-eds in total, bringing much-needed attention to ignored issues such as keyword search warrants, facial recognition, and police purchasing of personal data. In 2020, S.T.O.P. and our work appeared in nearly **every major English-language outlet on the planet.**

We became a leading global voice on the impact of COVID-19 surveillance on public health, equity, and civil rights. S.T.O.P. leveraged our position as a trusted thought leader to publicly rebut the techno-solutionism being pushed by tech vendors, government agencies, and others eager to reopen the country. This new level of public health and media engagement not only helped to center the COVID-19 debate around people – rather than profits – but also elevated S.T.O.P.'s profile on the national global stage.

**DAILY BEAST**



The New York Times

The Washington Post



**WIRED**

Vox



BuzzFeed News  
REPORTING TO YOU

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

**VICE**



The Guardian

We also launched a weekly podcast, **Surveillance and the City**. Co-hosted by AI activist (and S.T.O.P. Technology Director) Liz O'Sullivan, journalist Ali Winston, professor Rashida Richardson, and Albert Fox Cahn, Season 1 of Surveillance and the City broke down the latest developments in surveillance technology and boasted thousands of downloads.

The New York Times

*N.Y.P.D. Will No Longer Force Women to Remove Hijabs for Mug Shots*

The Guardian

Did you protest recently? Your face might be in a database

*Evan Selinger and Albert Fox Cahn*



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Brooklyn Community Foundation  
FJC - A Foundation of Philanthropic  
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Open Society Foundations

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## **Organizational**

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Engelberg Center on Innovation Policy  
and Law at NYU School of Law  
Urban Justice Center

## **Individuals**

Allan Forsyth    Norman Siegel  
Leigh Shapiro    Sarah Hale

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Amnesty International  
Decrim NY  
Electronic Frontier Alliance  
Government Accountability Project  
The Micah Institute  
MoveOn.org

Muslim Community Network  
New York Immigration Coalition  
New York Immigrant Freedom Fund  
Urban Justice Center  
Yemeni American Merchants Association



## 2020 Financials

*S.T.O.P. Statement of Activity: January - December 2020*

<b>Revenue</b>		<b>Total</b>
Direct Contributions	\$	11,834
Non-Government Grants	\$	434,150
Government Grants	\$	2,402
Program Sales & Fees	\$	3,213
Investments Revenue	\$	82
Misc. Revenue	\$	1,830
<b>Cash Revenue</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>453,510</b>
In-Kind Professional Services	\$	1,886,948
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>2,340,458</b>
<b>Expenditures</b>		
		<b>Total</b>
Salaries & Related Expenses	\$	167,615
Contract Service Expenses	\$	32,590
Non-personnel Expenses	\$	10,242
Facility Expenses	\$	293
Travel & Conference Expenses	\$	5,020
Interest Expense	\$	51
Insurance - Non-employee Related	\$	13,249
Membership Dues - Organization	\$	333
Staff & Volunteer Training	\$	100
Bank Fees	\$	343
Merchant Fees	\$	235
Advertising Expenses	\$	753
Business Taxes & Licensing Fees	\$	5,298
Other Expenses	\$	10,277
<b>Cash Expenses</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>246,399</b>
In-Kind Professional Services	\$	1,886,948
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>2,133,347</b>
<b>Net Revenue</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>207,111</b>

## Staff and Board

*S.T.O.P. grew significantly in 2020, becoming a globally recognized leader in the campaign to promote privacy and equity in technology, with nearly 100 staff, interns, volunteers, and pro bono attorneys fighting for New Yorkers' privacy.*

### STAFF

**Albert Fox Cahn, Esq.**, Executive Director

**Alexia Hall**, Video Production Intern

**Alena Khan**, Communications Intern

**Aly Panjwani**, Policy & Advocacy Manager

**Amanda Humell**, Legal Fellow

**Caroline Magee**, Civil Rights Intern

**Eleni Manis, PhD, MPA**, Research Director

**Francis Northwood**, Outreach Intern

**John Clayton**, Civil Rights Intern

**Justin Sherman**, Technology Advisor

**Kyto Batt**, Development Intern

**Liz O'Sullivan**, Technology Director

**Luke Meares**, Communications Intern

**Mahima Arya**, Computer Science Intern

**Naz Akyol**, Legal Associate

**Paige Hanoka**, Development Intern

**Sam Van Doran**, Development Director

**Shanzay Pervaiz**, Civil Rights Intern

**William Owen**, Communications Associate

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