

February 23, 2023

Douglas County Sheriff's Office
Aaron Hanson, Douglas County Sheriff
3601 North 156th Street
Omaha, NE 68116



134 S. 13th St. #1010
Lincoln, NE 68508
(402) 476-8091
aclunebraska.org

RE: Scanner Encryption

Dear Sheriff Hanson:

For over 50 years in Nebraska, the ACLU has worked in courts, the Legislature, and communities to protect the constitutional and individual rights of *all* people. With a nationwide network of offices and millions of members and supporters, we take up the toughest civil liberties fights. Beyond one person, party, or side — we the people dare to create a more perfect union.

We are writing to express concerns regarding the planned transition to encrypted radio channels.

Recently, Omaha Scanner published social media posts indicating that along with the Omaha Police Department, the Douglas County Sheriff's Office will soon make changes to its radio system so that live scanner traffic is no longer available to the public. Instead, newsrooms and members of the public will have access to a feed that is delayed by 15 minutes.

We urge you to reconsider this decision and we have expressed similar concerns to the Omaha Police Department.

Removing public access to a live feed reduces transparency and accountability. Under this plan, journalists and other members of the public would have to wait 15 minutes to learn of a matter of public importance unless deputies choose to update the public before then. This waiting period translates to drivers missing a chance to learn about an accident before they are stuck in traffic, journalists missing crucial moments that would benefit from an independent camera at a scene, and Douglas County residents missing out on timely social media explanations for situations that might soon result in numerous unnecessary calls to dispatchers. The list goes on.

Although we understand the public safety considerations inspiring this change, we believe the current occasional use of encrypted channels already provides a means to protect deputy safety in sensitive situations while simultaneously protecting public access to live information.

Ultimately, live scanner traffic provides an invaluable, real-time look at what deputies are doing with the public resources and authority with which they are entrusted. Switching to a delayed feed puts the responsibility and ability of providing real-time updates to the public solely on your office, bottlenecking information that has benefited community members time and time again.

If you are open to reevaluating this approach, we pledge our support as thought partners in discussing better solutions for Douglas County.

Sincerely,



Mindy Rush Chipman
Interim Executive Director
Legal Director

