

MEDIA RELEASE

Community group concerned about government promoting surveillance cameras in schools

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - May 13, 2010

VANCOUVER – The Vancouver Public Space Network (VPSN) is calling on the BC government to reconsider proposed amendments to the *School Act*. The changes, contained in a recent piece of omnibus legislation (Bill 20 - *2010 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act No.3*), would legally entrench the ability of schools to install video surveillance technology in classrooms, playgrounds and other public school facilities.

It is the Vancouver Public Space Network's position that schools should be free of video surveillance, except as a tool of last resort and when its use is clearly justified. The proposed bill states that a school board "may install and operate a video surveillance camera in a school facility or on school land for the purposes of protecting the safety of individuals, their belongings or school property".

However, the VPSN feels that this connection is flawed. "We're concerned that the BC government has positioned surveillance cameras as an effective tool for protecting the safety of students and school property," says Josh Paterson, VPSN Surveillance & Security Coordinator. "The truth is they're not very good at deterring or solving crimes or bad behaviour."

According to Paterson, the amendments to the School Act set out the purposes for which cameras may be used in schools, but fail to set out any specific criteria to guide school boards in their deployment of surveillance cameras - or require school boards to establish such policies.

"If enshrining the opportunity for schools to use surveillance technology is bad, it's even worse that the proposed bill allows cameras to be used without setting any rules governing what circumstances they are allowed, how they should be operated, how students' privacy rights will be safeguarded, who has access to the images, and places where surveillance cameras are inappropriate. If the Province is going to open this door, they should require stringent rules to avoid the possibility of over-use and abuse of surveillance cameras," says Paterson

There are also considerations about the effectiveness of surveillance technology in creating safer spaces. Research shows that surveillance cameras are ineffective both at decreasing unwanted behaviour and at catching criminals after the event. In addition, there are also significant economic considerations as well as CCTV technology – including capital and operating costs - is costly and provides a low return on investment.

"Given the lack of evidence that surveillance cameras make us any safer, authorizing school boards to spend lots of money on ongoing surveillance capacity is not the best

investment, especially given the looming significant budget cuts in local school boards,” said Forbes.

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FURTHER BACKGROUND

(1) Vancouver Public Space Network: Letter to Hon. Margaret MacDiarmid, Minister of Education – <http://www.vancouverpublicspace.ca>

(2) Education Act Amendments: http://leg.bc.ca/39th2nd/1st_read/gov20-1.htm

(3) BC Information and Privacy Commissioner, Public Surveillance System Privacy Guidelines: <http://www.oipc.bc.ca/advice/VID-SURV%282006%29.pdf>

(4) Royal Academy of Engineering (UK) 2007 Report, Dilemmas of Privacy and Surveillance: Challenges of Technological Change