

Sacramento California has been tracking license plates to spy on benefits recipients

[Photo: [lvdzwaag/Pixabay](#)]

BY MELISSA LOCKER

Sacramento County officials have been tracking the license plates of welfare recipients in the hopes of catching potential fraud, according to a new [report](#) in the *Sacramento Bee*.

The license plate monitoring program, which [the ACLU warned us](#) about, **snaps photos of license plates when the cars they are attached to make their way past telephone poles and police cars**, letting officials track the location of vehicles.

Welfare fraud investigators working with the Sacramento County Department of Human Assistance (DHA) pay \$5,000 a year for access to the license plate reader database to track those welfare recipients they suspect of fraud. This isn't new, either: They've been doing it since 2016.

It's not immediately clear what welfare investigators are even hoping to do with the information they unearth by tracking license plates, but the *Sacramento Bee* reports the DHA accessed the data over a thousand times in two years.

The Electronic Frontier Foundation [revealed](#) this surveillance two weeks ago, pointing out that under [California law](#) license plate data cannot be collected without a privacy policy that "is consistent with respect for individuals' privacy and civil liberties." Until the EFF called them out, the DHA did not have such a policy. Now, they have put one in place to ensure that

investigators could justify their requests for the license-plate tracking data.

The use of such license plate tracking software is not only a potential violation of privacy rights, but is also an odd use of limited resources for a statistically rare phenomenon. In 2012, the DHA [found only 500 cases](#) of fraud among Sacramento's 193,000 recipients.