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ACLU seeks details of Greitens' St. Louis Crime Plan, claims 'predictive policing' models lead to racial profiling

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On July 10, Gov . Eric Greitens announced new state partnerships in fighting crime in St. Louis. The American Civil Liberties Union of Missouri has sought details of the plan from the governor under the state's open records law.

Photo by Wiley Price

The American Civil Liberties Union of Missouri sent a Sunshine Law request on July 19 to the office of Gov. Eric Greitens asking for government transparency on the details of his recently announced plan to use state resources to combat crime in the city of St. Louis.

The ACLU of Missouri requested all records relating to the Missouri State Highway Patrol's and the Missouri Department of Public Safety's partnerships with the Mission Saves Task Force that the governor announced on July 10. The ACLU is also asking for records detailing the scope and form of these partnerships – specifically, which data is being used and how the task force anticipates interpreting interstate firearms crime data to strategically place troopers.

Predictive policing models use past incidents and police encounters as data points to estimate where police officers may need to take action in the future. However, the ACLU claimed, crime prediction models rely on flawed and outdated statistics that reflect the bias of the criminal justice system.

“What predictive policing does do is racially profile and assume guilt among already over-policed neighborhoods,” said Jeffrey Mittman, ACLU of Missouri executive director. “By relying on outdated strategies, Gov. Greitens' plan threatens to make many communities' already strained relationship with police even worse instead of better.”

Black motorists in Missouri are stopped at a rate 75 percent higher than whites, according to data gathered by the Missouri attorney general. Using automated predictions based on biased data will only give St. Louis more of the same, the ACLU claimed. People of color will continue to be wrongfully pulled over, searched, jailed, and incarcerated at higher rates than whites, continuing the erosion of trust between police and communities, and failing to make any of us safer, the ACLU claimed.

The ACLU claimed Greitens' plan to invest in predictive policing doubles down on a practice that is proven to damage this relationship and is reminiscent of the failed war on drugs – a broken effort that became a war on the poor and communities of color, the ACLU claimed.

As of noon on July 20, the ACLU said it has received no response from the governor.