

# Concerns around gunshot-detection system need to be addressed

By Kirsten McMahon, Associate Editor



Privacy concerns over the City of Toronto's plan to increase surveillance and incorporate new audio technology to detect gunfire are "a little overblown," Toronto criminal lawyer [Jacob Stilman](#) tells [The Lawyer's Daily](#).

The legal publication reports the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA) is concerned about Toronto's plan to increase surveillance and incorporate ShotSpotter technology, which detects gunfire through microphones placed throughout city streets.

"After the recent gun attack on the Danforth, a busy neighbourhood near Toronto's downtown, City Council approved funding for increased surveillance on July 23 with an amendment for further study into ShotSpotter. Council stipulated that the Toronto Police Services Board must report back to council on the technology's effectiveness in the first quarter of 2019," the article states.

Stilman, a partner with [Lo Greco Stilman LLP](#), says he's concerned about how effective the ShotSpotter technology is and how it will be used.

"The company makes great claims as to its phenomenal reduction in gun violence in Chicago and San Francisco. I'm a little skeptical. Clearly there haven't been independently validated studies of how this thing works," he says.

He says his apprehension is that this technology is not being run by the police, but by a third party in the U.S.

"As a defence lawyer, it can be very difficult to access this data. Companies, especially if it's offshore and centred in the States, they're not going to be receptive to subpoenas. They're going to thumb their noses at us," Stilman tells the legal publication.

While the CCLA has raised concerns about ShotSpotter being used to stigmatize certain neighbourhoods, he says that some of those communities might welcome this kind of surveillance.

"That's where I think public consultation might be a good idea to try to, from a political standpoint, address those concerns," Stilman says.

"There are going to be people saying, 'You're stigmatizing our community.' And there are going to be people in those communities saying, 'We're tired of bodies being picked up on the street and we want more effective law enforcement.' I can see that debate unfolding," he adds.

He tells AdvocateDaily.com that he can see the concern of stigmatizing certain areas if the technology is set up in what is perceived to be at-risk areas.

"Public consultation is important because there may well be people in those areas who would welcome this. Certainly not everybody in a neighbourhood is going to be concerned with privacy issues," Stilman tells the legal newswire.

"These are devices that, if they function the way they're supposed to, are programmed to detect gunshots in public places. I don't see that triggering huge privacy concerns. This system is designed to isolate guns going off in public areas. Unless it somehow penetrates walls, I think the concerns are somewhat inflated."

He adds that if the use of ShotSpotter technology is well publicized, it may act as a deterrent.

“If people think there's some kind of super crime-fighting technology around, whether it works or not, it may have an impact of suppressing certain behaviours,” Stilman notes.