



 **Opinion**
Editorial Board

Cambridge chose ideology over public safety. Now a city worker is dead.

Politicians getting rid of ShotSpotter have hurt the neighborhoods they're trying to help.

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ShotSpotter equipment in Chicago. (Charles Rex Arbogast/AP)

Prioritizing ideology over public safety has consequences. One of them may be Xavier Bautista's life.

In May, the City Council in Cambridge, Massachusetts, decided to remove ShotSpotter, an acoustic gunfire detection technology, over concerns about police surveillance in high-crime neighborhoods.

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When Bautista, a 32-year-old public works employee, was wounded on July 4, no one called 911 to report hearing shots in the area. Authorities believe he was shot about an hour before his body was found.

A Cambridge Police Department spokesman told local press that it's "plausible" the technology "could have resulted in first responders arriving on-scene to render aid to the victim more quickly."

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Before ShotSpotter was removed, one of the sensors was at an intersection close to where Bautista was found dead, according to the police union.

Critics of the technology point out that it sometimes generates false positives for gun fire. Others contend the system leads to overpolicing in minority communities. After a 2024 report suggested that ShotSpotter is primarily used in Black and Hispanic neighborhoods, the Bay State's two Democratic senators, Ed Markey and Elizabeth Warren, urged the Department of Homeland Security to investigate its funding of the technology.

But how exactly does it help minority residents for police to not know when shots have been fired? Officers cannot possibly patrol every street at every hour. If someone fires a gun outside a politician's house, of course they would want the cops to respond rapidly to the scene. Why don't their constituents deserve the same level of service from law enforcement?

ShotSpotter technology helps first responders arrive more quickly. Over the last decade, in Cambridge alone, the sensors flagged 11 instances of reported gunfire that weren't called in to police, including a drive-by shooting and a domestic violence incident. The system is used effectively in more than a dozen cities across Massachusetts, including Boston and Somerville.

In response to Bautista's killing, Cambridge Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui (D), who voted to get rid of ShotSpotter, said that "we'll have some next steps." The first should be restoring the system that might have saved the life of one of her own employees.

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