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The sheriff's office defends the stop as reasonable and wants a new lawsuit thrown out.

Iraq War Veteran Claims Flock Camera Error Led to Police Stop at Gunpoint

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FILE - A Flock Safety license plate reader is seen along a public road, Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025, in Houston. (AP Photo/David Goldman, File)

A South Carolina sheriff's office is asking a federal judge to dismiss a lawsuit filed by an Iraq War veteran who claims a mistaken automated license plate camera alert led deputies to hold him at gunpoint outside his home.

Steven Melvin, 42, an Iraq War veteran from Lake Wylie, S.C., sued the York County Sheriff's Office and three officers after a February 2024 traffic stop triggered by a [Flock Safety license plate reader](#). The lawsuit, originally filed in state court in June and later moved to federal court, alleges excessive force, false imprisonment and negligence.

[Flock Safety's automated license plate readers](#) photograph vehicles and convert plate images into searchable data. The system can issue real-time alerts when a plate or vehicle characteristics match information on law enforcement hot lists, including records associated with stolen vehicles.

They have drawn widespread criticism in recent months, with communities across the country either removing the technology at citizens' requests, or citizens themselves taking the cameras into their own hands—literally—by [tearing them down](#). It's become a [major First Amendment and mass surveillance issue](#), in line with arguments about artificial intelligence and data centers.

What the Lawsuit Says

According to the lawsuit and internal sheriff's office records reported by the *Rock Hill Herald*, the [Flock system incorrectly identified](#) Melvin's black BMW as a stolen vehicle.

Deputy Kyle Brogden approached Melvin with his firearm drawn and ordered him out of the car, according to the lawsuit. Melvin was then ordered to kneel with his hands above his head and remained there for roughly five minutes while deputies checked his information.

The lawsuit says Melvin "feared for his life and reasonably believed he could be shot."



Flock safety camera. (Photo credit: Public domain/Wiki Commons)

Deputies eventually determined his BMW was not the stolen vehicle.

No trial date has been set. The lawsuit, *Melvin v. York County Sheriff's Office et al.*, is pending in U.S. District Court for the District of South Carolina.

Sheriff's Office Says Stop Was Reasonable

The York County Sheriff's Office denies violating Melvin's rights and has asked a federal judge to dismiss the case.

Attorneys for the sheriff's office and deputies argue that the mistaken identification did not make the stop unconstitutional and that the officers did not use objectively unreasonable force.

"A mistake of fact leading to a seizure under the Fourth Amendment does not amount to a Constitutional violation," attorneys David Holler and Ross Campbell wrote in the filing, according to the *Herald*.

Internal records cited in local reporting said Melvin's license plate had a tinted or otherwise obstructive cover that contributed to the camera reading the first character incorrectly.

He was released after deputies determined the vehicle was his and received a warning, rather than a citation, for the plate cover.

Flock Cameras Have Expanded Across Law Enforcement

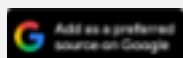
Flock acknowledges in its current policy that license plate translations can occasionally be incomplete or inaccurate. The company says users should confirm the computer-generated translation before acting on an alert.

York County Sheriff Tony Breeden has defended his department's use of the cameras, saying they have helped investigators close more than 250 cases involving crimes including homicide, robbery, burglary and assault. He also said the department is developing a transparency portal showing how the technology is used.

Flock says its license plate reader network operates across 49 states and provides alerts and searchable vehicle information to law enforcement agencies and other customers.

The company also announced additional privacy, accountability and transparency safeguards this summer amid broader scrutiny of automated license plate readers.

In discussing data accuracy, Flock emphasized that an alert should be treated as an investigative lead rather than a final determination.



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