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Dear Ken Murphy, Simon Roberts, Nish Kankiwala, Shirine Khoury-Haq and Lord Wolfson of Aspley Guise, CEOs of Tesco, Sainsbury's, John Lewis, Co-op and Next,

We are writing as anti-poverty, homelessness, human rights, criminal justice, data, tech and privacy experts to express our deep concern about the planned launch of Project Pegasus, a collaboration between retailers and the police that involves the use of facial recognition technology in response to a rise in shoplifting. As CEOs of businesses with stores across the country, you have the chance to lead from the front and do the right thing; we urge you to halt these plans.

According to [reports](#), Project Pegasus will involve police running CCTV images that you provide of alleged shoplifters from your stores through the Police National Database, and those images will be run through controversial facial recognition technology. We are aware that the Policing Minister, Chris Philp, has also tasked police leaders with drawing up a target list of shoplifters, in order to set up a national shoplifting database which can be used by police and retailers nationwide.

We recognise that shoplifting is a growing challenge for retailers alongside the aim of ensuring the safety of your employees – challenges we believe are best addressed by understanding the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on people across the country right now. Basic food items like bread, butter and cheese have risen in price [by over 30%](#) in the past year alongside skyrocketing energy, housing and fuel costs. In a [report](#) published by the Poverty Strategy Commission, nearly a third of those officially experiencing hardship in the UK are in deep poverty, and struggling to buy sufficient food, energy and clothes, pay rent and meet other everyday bills. While it may be tempting to look to tech to solve complex societal problems, the reality is that we cannot police and surveil our way out of a cost-of-living crisis, low wages, an inadequate social security system, soaring housing costs and rocketing food prices.

[1 in 10](#) young people report having shoplifted to cope with the continued bite of the cost-of-living crisis. [Shop workers](#) are increasingly sharing their experiences of seeing people in need unable to pay for items. [People experiencing in-work poverty](#) express the frustration

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at bosses not being paid enough to afford enough food to eat. The reports are endless – people are struggling and need support, not surveillance.

Facial recognition technology is a highly intimidating, mass surveillance tool that has no place in your shops, or on our streets. Its proposed use to monitor the public in shops across the country will threaten your customers' right to privacy as you hand over their sensitive biometric data as they go about their daily lives.

Facial recognition technology will also amplify existing inequalities within the criminal justice system. It notoriously misidentifies [people of colour](#), [women and LGBTQ+ people](#), meaning that already marginalised groups are more likely to be subject to an invasive stop by police, or may be at increased risk of physical surveillance, monitoring and harassment by workers in your stores. We are dismayed to see UK businesses reverse steps made following the Black Lives Matter movement, including [commitments to be champions](#) of diversity, equality and inclusion – this same commitment must extend to your customers.

There is currently no legal basis for police use of facial recognition technology, and in [the world's first known legal challenge](#) to police use of the tech the Court of Appeal found that South Wales Police's use of facial recognition technology was unlawful, that it breached privacy rights, data protection laws and equality laws. We are concerned that your collaboration with police on the use of this controversial technology will pave the way towards increased use and normalisation of the tech in other parts of daily life. Meanwhile across the globe, including in the [EU](#), legislators are taking steps to ban or severely restrict the use of the technology.

You cannot police and surveil your way out of poverty — retailers like you have the opportunity to lead by example by working with the Government to meaningfully address the cost-of-living crisis so that everyone has the resources they need.

We are calling on you to scrap the use of facial recognition technology in your shops and push the Government to provide real solutions to the cost-of-living crisis.

Signed,

Akiko Hart, Interim Director, Liberty

Silkie Carlo, Director, Big Brother Watch

Sacha Deshmukh, Chief Executive, Amnesty International UK

Dr Shabna Begum and Laurence Jay, Interim Co-CEOs, Runnymede Trust

Neil Jeffery, Interim CEO, Fair Trials

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Fiona Rutherford, Chief Executive, JUSTICE

Jess McQuail, Director, Just Fair

Laurence Guinness, Chief Executive Officer, The Childhood Trust

Elodie Berland, Director, Streets Kitchen

Melanie Jameson, Quakers in Criminal Justice

Carla Ecola, Managing Director, The Outside Project

Jim Killock, Executive Director, Open Rights Group

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Alexandrine Pirlot de Corbion, Director of Strategy, Privacy International