LAWYERS' COMMITTEE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS UNDER LAW

OMNILERT LITIGATION

The Teenagers and Their Story...They Were Waiting to Go Home

Taki, Osa, Keith, and Devon were outside Kenwood High School in Baltimore County after football practice on October 20, 2025. They were talking and eating chips.

According to the complaint, Omnilert's AI gun-detection system, which was integrated into the school's security camera system, flagged the bag of chips in Taki's hand as a gun. Omnilert's human reviewers missed the error and forwarded the alert to school and police officials. Within two minutes, school and police officials recognized the mistake and canceled the alert.

The complaint explains that more than ten minutes after the cancellation, the school principal sent a screenshot from the original alert to the school resource officer without verifying that the alert was still active. The officer forwarded it to Baltimore County police, prompting an armed response. Officers arrived with guns drawn, ordered the four teenagers to their knees, handcuffed them, and searched them.

A Warning for School Communities Nationwide

What happened to Taki, Osa, Keith, and Devon raises questions that extend far beyond one school.

As school districts adopt AI security systems, they need to understand the technology's limitations and the consequences of false alerts. They also need to ensure that clear rules, training, oversight, and opportunities for community input are in place.

No AI system absolves school and police officials of their responsibility to exercise independent judgment. They remain responsible for assessing the information available, responding to corrections or cancellations, and protecting students' safety and civil rights.

Black and Brown children already face criminalization, wrongful targeting, and excessive discipline. Technology that triggers police responses can compound those risks when institutions fail to protect students' rights.

A system marketed to keep children safe must be scrutinized for the harm it can cause.

Black students deserve access to the benefits of technology and protection from harms when institutions deploy it.

Link: Explore Our AI Civil Rights Work

RECOMMENDATIONS

Preventing the Next Harm

A false AI alert puts students in danger when school officials, dispatchers, and police lack clear procedures for verifying alerts and acting on cancellations. We recommend that school districts and law enforcement agencies take these steps:

- Assess the technology before buying it: Test whether the system works as advertised, examine the risk of racial bias, and consider whether other investments would better serve students. If the system is adopted, monitor its errors and effects on students.
- Require meaningful, independent human verification: School officials should review the underlying evidence and confirm that it shows a firearm before using an AI alert to summon police. Train staff to recognize the system's limitations and the tendency to trust an automated alert even when the evidence points the other way.
- Get cancellations to the people who need them: Log cancellations automatically in the dispatch system, require dispatchers to verify an alert's status before sending officers, and tell responding officers when a call originated from an AI alert. Require designated reviewers to agree before overriding a cancellation.
- Protect every student's civil rights: Train officers to independently assess the evidence and determine whether there is individualized reasonable suspicion for each person they stop. An AI alert alone should not justify a stop or search, and students should not be detained simply because they are near someone shown in an alert. Train officers to intervene when they witness a violation by other officers.
- Give families a voice and make outcomes public: Involve families, students, and educators in decisions about whether and how to use these systems. Assign clear responsibility for enforcing procedures and publicly report errors and outcomes so communities can assess whether the technology is making students safer.

A Broader Push for AI Accountability

The proposed AI Civil Rights Act would require covered companies to assess the civil rights risks of their AI systems. In this case, that would mean assessing the risks of Omnilert's gun-detection technology before it was put into use, including how false alerts could harm students. The proposal applies to covered private companies; the recommendations above address the separate responsibilities of public schools and law enforcement.

Link: Learn about the AI Civil Rights Act