



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Aftab Pureval and Members of Cincinnati City Council

FROM: Todd Zinser

DATE: October 5, 2026

SUBJECT: Parking Safety Alternative: Transparency, Prevention and Performance

RE: Chapter 413 - Parking Garages and Parking Lots

Proposal

We are proposing that Cincinnati consider a Transparency and Performance-Based Parking Safety Program as an alternative to the recently adopted mandatory camera/attendant requirements for licensed parking lots and garages. The City's lighting requirements would remain. In place of a universal camera/attendant mandate, the City would require prominent, standardized disclosure of each facility's reported vehicle break-ins, backed by City-controlled data, public reporting, and progressively stronger security requirements for facilities that fail to improve.

The approach is built around five principles: transparency, prevention, market incentives, accountability, and targeted escalation. It seeks to reduce vehicle break-ins while giving motorists useful information and allowing parking operators flexibility to choose the security measures that work best at their facilities.

1. Transparency

CPD should maintain the authoritative facility-level data. Using a uniform definition, the Cincinnati Police Department would identify reported vehicle break-ins occurring at each licensed parking lot or garage. Parking operators would not determine the statistics displayed to customers.

Each facility would display a standardized City-provided sign showing reported vehicle break-ins during the most recently completed month, the rolling 12-month total, and the number of parking spaces. The sign should be positioned, where practicable, so a motorist can see the disclosure before committing to park.

A permanent facility-specific QR code would take motorists directly to a City-hosted page showing current and historical data for that facility. Cincinnati should also maintain a searchable citywide parking-safety database and downloadable dataset so residents, operators, Council and the news media can compare facilities and trends over time.

2. Prevention and Public Awareness

The sign would do more than disclose a facility's safety record. It would repeatedly remind motorists, at the precise time and place where the decision matters, to remove valuables and firearms from their vehicles.

The standardized sign should prominently state: "REMOVE VALUABLES AND FIREARMS FROM YOUR VEHICLE." This creates an ongoing public-awareness campaign at parking facilities throughout Cincinnati. If motorists respond by leaving fewer valuables and firearms in parked vehicles, the potential rewards from vehicle break-ins should decline.

The City should avoid posting facility-specific counts of stolen firearms on the physical sign. The purpose is to discourage motorists from leaving firearms in vehicles without inadvertently advertising a particular facility as a place where firearms have historically been found.

3. Market Incentives

Public disclosure creates a continuing incentive to improve actual safety performance. If two nearby facilities offer comparable parking but one has substantially fewer reported break-ins, customers can take that information into account when deciding where to park.

An operator with an unfavorable record would have an economic reason to improve it. The operator could choose the measures best suited to the facility—cameras, active monitoring, attendants, fencing, patrols, controlled access, improved lighting beyond the minimum, or another effective measure. The objective would be better results, not merely installation of prescribed equipment.

4. Accountability and Measurement

The City should establish baseline facility-level data and publicly evaluate results after 12 and 24 months. The evaluation should examine whether vehicle break-ins decline overall, whether high-incident facilities improve after disclosure, and whether incidents appear to shift to street parking or other locations.

This approach measures outcomes rather than only regulatory compliance. The relevant question should not be how many cameras were installed; it should be whether fewer vehicles were broken into.

Historical figures should remain available rather than being overwritten each month. That permits the public and policymakers to determine whether individual facilities and the City as a whole are improving.

5. Targeted Escalation

Disclosure should be the first intervention, not necessarily the last. The ordinance should establish objective criteria for identifying facilities with persistently high incident levels or a failure to improve over a reasonable period.

A facility meeting those criteria could first be required to submit a security-improvement plan. If performance remains poor, the City could impose progressively stronger requirements tailored to the facility, potentially including cameras, active monitoring, attendants, controlled access, patrols, or other measures.

This concentrates the greatest regulatory burden on facilities demonstrating an actual continuing problem rather than assuming in advance that every facility requires the same security technology.

Coverage of City Facilities

The transparency requirements should apply to all parking lots and garages subject to Chapter 413 and to all City-owned or City-controlled parking facilities offered for use by the general public. The City should hold its own parking facilities to the same transparency standard it requires of private operators.

City Responsibility for Signs and Updates

Because the displayed statistics would be official City public-safety information, Cincinnati should design and pay for the standardized signs. City ownership would promote uniformity, visibility and public confidence and would prevent operators from minimizing unfavorable information through their own sign design.

The signs should be durable but easily updated. A permanent sign could contain replaceable, weather-resistant number inserts for the monthly and rolling 12-month figures, while the facility identification and QR code remain permanent. The City would provide the official monthly figures; operators would be responsible for timely updating, prominently displaying and maintaining the sign. The City should pay for the initial sign and ordinary City-required updates; an operator should pay to replace a sign that it loses, damages, removes or fails to maintain.

The QR code provides an additional safeguard: even if a physical number insert is outdated, the facility-specific City webpage can always display the current official data.

Data Standards and Administration

- Define precisely which reported incidents count, such as theft from a motor vehicle, attempted theft from a motor vehicle, and criminal damaging associated with an attempted break-in.
- Establish a consistent CPD method for assigning incidents to the correct licensed facility and a simple process for correcting mistaken assignments.
- Use the most recently completed calendar month rather than a partial current month.
- Use a rolling 12-month total so a single quiet month does not obscure a facility's longer-term record.
- Show facility capacity on the sign rather than estimated vehicle volume unless Cincinnati later develops a reliable and uniform measure of actual parking transactions.
- If reliable facility-utilization data are available or can reasonably be collected, the City should consider publishing a normalized incident rate, such as reported break-ins per 10,000 parked vehicles, to permit meaningful comparisons among facilities of different sizes and utilization levels. This analytical information could appear on the City webpage reached through the QR code rather than cluttering the physical sign.
- Provide a web address in addition to the QR code for accessibility and for users who do not scan QR codes.
- Maintain historical facility and citywide data so changes can be independently evaluated.

Research Transparency

During Council's consideration of the parking legislation, CPD testimony referred to research concerning the effectiveness of surveillance cameras, including what was described as a study of studies. The City should post or link to the research relied upon in recommending the camera requirement. If research is being used to support a regulatory mandate on private businesses, making that evidence readily available is itself an important element of transparency.

Conclusion

This proposal does not minimize the vehicle break-in problem or eliminate basic safety requirements. Lighting would remain mandatory, official crime information would become more visible, motorists would receive repeated prevention reminders, and facilities that fail to improve would face escalating requirements.

The difference is that Cincinnati would begin with transparency and performance. The City would provide trustworthy information; consumers could use that information when choosing where to park; operators would have a continuing financial incentive to improve; and stronger regulation would be directed toward facilities whose results demonstrate that it is needed.

Attachment: Illustrative Parking Safety Information Sign

ATTACHMENT
Illustrative Parking Safety Information Sign

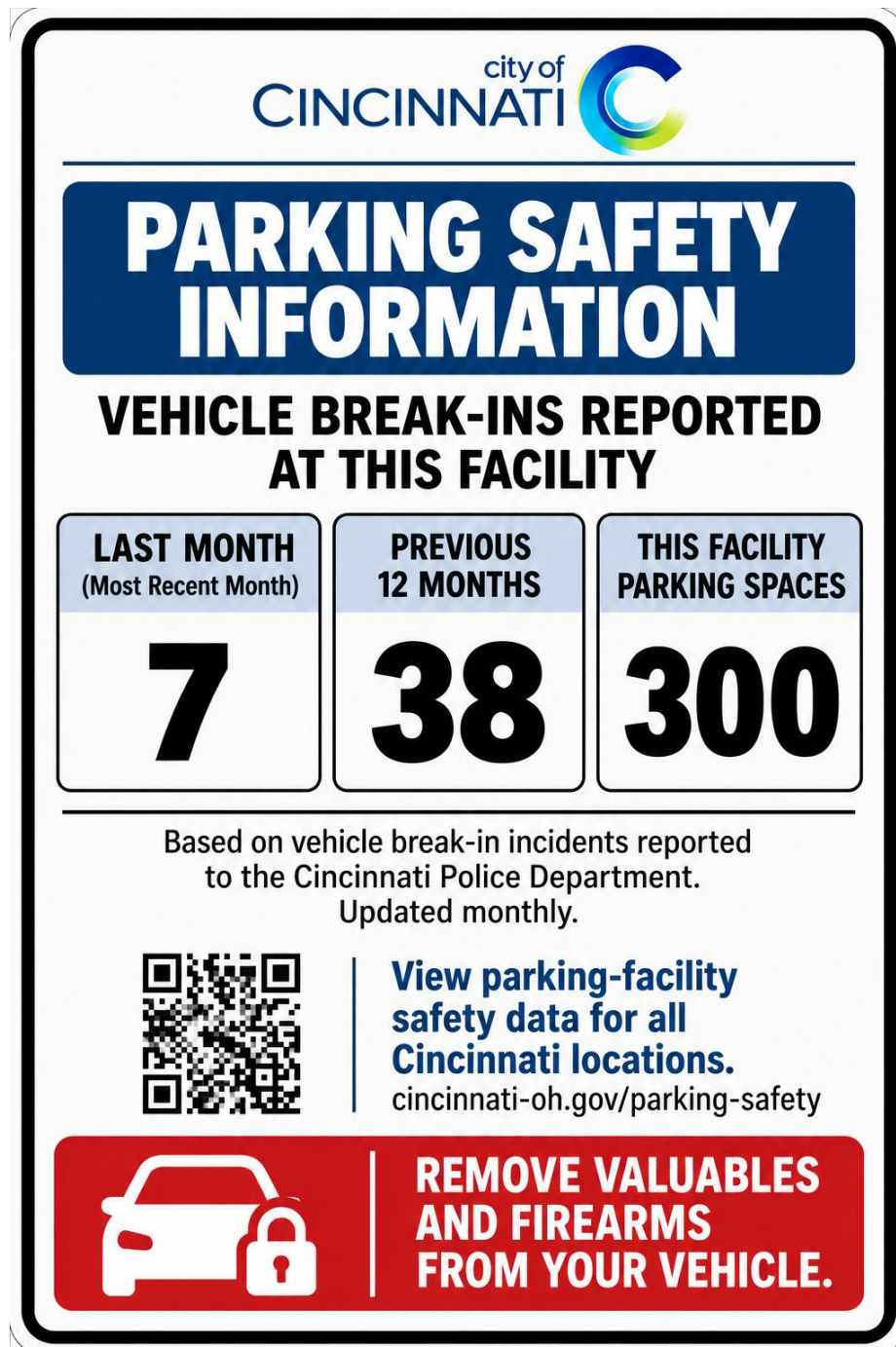


Illustration only. The City would establish final wording, branding, placement, update mechanism, web address and QR destination.