

In May 2022, the Axon AI Ethics Board voted 8-4 against Axon Enterprise proceeding with a pilot program of Project ION, a Taser weapon that could be attached to drones or robots.

Following this vote, and just one week after the deadly mass shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, Axon announced that it was proceeding with the development of this weapon for use in schools and other potential mass shooting sites – a use that the Ethics Board had never evaluated.

In response, [nine out of 12 members of the Board resigned](#). This [report, authored by the resigning members of Axon's AI Ethics Board](#), sets forth for the first time the Board's reasons for voting against Axon's Project ION. The report comes as Axon continues its push for weaponized drones at its TASERCON conference.

The report includes:

- ***New details about proposed ethical guardrails.*** The Ethics Board developed a range of essential safeguards, which served as the basis for its deliberations over a pilot program. The report provides new details about the ION pilot program and proposed safeguards, including the Board's decision that **Axon should never release a drone with an autonomous weapon, should require officers to attempt de-escalation measures, and should always require policing agencies to obtain legislative authorization prior to using ION.**
- ***An inside view of the Board's deliberations.*** The report offers an inside view of the Board's deliberations over the program. The Board took seriously the potential for ION to save lives by allowing officers to use a Taser weapon in place of traditional firearms. However, Board members expressed grave concerns over potential harms, including:
 - The potential for abuse, especially in light of existing patterns of misconduct with Tasers (including their use against children, elderly people, and individuals who are restrained);
 - The possibility that the technology might increase use-of-force rates (the report includes new details about a literature review commissioned by the Board which found mixed evidence regarding the effect of Tasers on use of force rates); and
 - The disproportionate deployment of new technologies against Black, brown, and other marginalized communities.
- ***The facts about the Board's vote against Axon's Project ION.*** The report explains in detail why a majority of the Board voted against the ION pilot program proceeding. The Board acknowledged and fully considered Axon's willingness to implement meaningful safeguards. But the majority of Board members believed that given some of the root issues with policing

in the United States – including a failure by some agencies to enforce policies and hold bad actors accountable – it would be irresponsible to deploy this technology today.

The report also details the concerns of some Board members over Axon’s plans to use this technology in schools. Although there is no question that society must urgently address school shootings, Axon’s solution struck some Board members as impractical; moreover, it does nothing to address the *causes* of mass shootings – the availability of high-powered weapons and the failure to control who has access to them.

For more information about the report, visit policingproject.org/ion.