



EMERGING TECH

## California police department granted FAA waiver to fly drones at 400 feet

The Elk Grove, California, Police Department has been granted permission to use drones within an exceptionally large area of airspace.

BY [SOPHIA FOX-SOWELL](#) • JANUARY 28, 2025

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**T**he Elk Grove, California, Police Department, on Tuesday [announced](#) it's been granted permission by the Federal Aviation Administration to fly drones at an altitude of 400 feet, beyond the operator's visual line of sight.

The police department of the Sacramento suburb claims the waiver "represents the largest square miles of approval for law enforcement drone operations in the nation."

Normally, drones and other uncrewed aircraft flown in the U.S. must perform operations within sight of the operator, [per FAA regulations](#). The administration grants approval to fly beyond visual line of sight, or BVLOS, on a case by case basis depending on the risks of the operation, according to a [2024 report](#) by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

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commitment to leveraging innovative technology to enhance public safety while maintaining accountability and transparency in our operations.”

The Elk Grove Police Department launched its “Drone as a First Responder” program in 2024 to deliver real-time video intelligence on emergency response calls, using human visual observers stationed on rooftops.

The drones allow police officers to track suspects and vehicles involved in ongoing crimes and better manage situational awareness, according to the [department’s website](#).

Last year, former [San Francisco Mayor London Breed](#) and Police Chief William Scott said in a [press briefing](#) that drones had been “transformative” for the city’s police department. They said the technology has led to arrests, criminal charges and decade-low levels of crime.

Civil rights groups, meanwhile, [have called for increased safeguards](#) limiting the use of drones as more police departments use them for a growing number of situations. The American Civil Liberties Union has cited concerns with the potential for passive surveillance and invasions of privacy.



## Written by Sophia Fox-Sowell

Sophia Fox-Sowell reports on artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and government regulation for StateScoop. She was previously a multimedia producer for CNET, where her coverage focused on private sector innovation in food production, climate change and space through podcasts and video content. She earned her bachelor’s in anthropology at Wagner College and master’s in [media innovation from Northeastern University](#).

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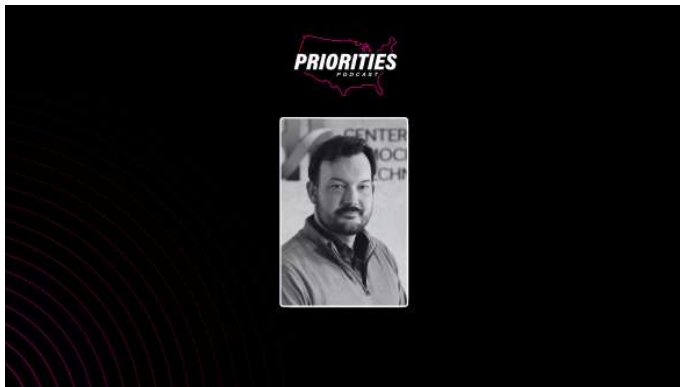
FAA to ease restrictions on flying drones beyond operator's line of sight

BY SOPHIA FOX-SOWELL

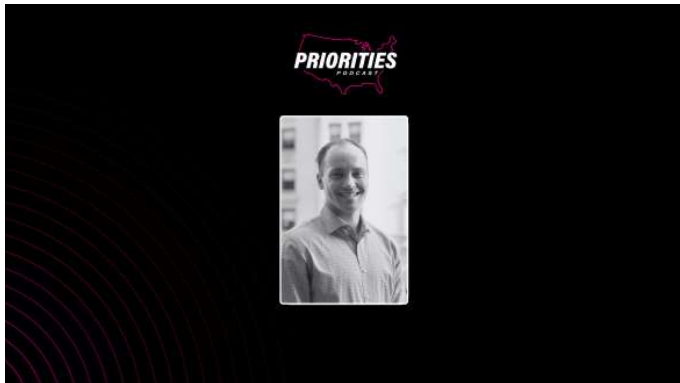
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