NO to DHS Social Media Password Requirement
21 February 2017

Coalition Condemns DHS Proposal to Demand Passwords to Enter the U.S.

The undersigned coalition of human rights and civil liberties organizations, trade associations, and experts in security, technology, and the law expresses deep concern about the comments made by Secretary John Kelly at the House Homeland Security Committee hearing on February 7th, 2017, suggesting the Department of Homeland Security could require non-citizens to provide the passwords to their social media accounts as a condition of entering the country.

We recognize the important role that DHS plays in protecting the United States’ borders and the challenges it faces in keeping the U.S. safe, but demanding passwords or other account credentials without cause will fail to increase the security of U.S. citizens and is a direct assault on fundamental rights.

This proposal would enable border officials to invade people’s privacy by examining years of private emails, texts, and messages. It would expose travelers and everyone in their social networks, including potentially millions of U.S. citizens, to excessive, unjustified scrutiny. And it would discourage people from using online services or taking their devices with them while traveling, and would discourage travel for business, tourism, and journalism.

Demands from U.S. border officials for passwords to social media accounts will also set a precedent that may ultimately affect all travelers around the world. This demand is likely to be mirrored by foreign governments, which will demand passwords from U.S. citizens when they seek entry to foreign countries. This would compromise U.S. economic security, cybersecurity, and national security, as well as damage the U.S.’s relationships with foreign governments and their citizenry.

Policies to demand passwords as a condition of travel, as well as more general efforts to force individuals to disclose their online activity, including potentially years’ worth of private and public communications, create an intense chilling effect on individuals. Freedom of expression and press rights, access to information, rights of association, and religious liberty are all put at risk by these policies.

The first rule of online security is simple: Do not share your passwords. No government agency should undermine security, privacy, and other rights with a blanket policy of demanding passwords from individuals.

Organizations and Trade Associations

11/9 Coalition
Access Now
Advocacy for Principled Action in Government
American Civil Liberties Union

American Library Association
American Society of Journalists & Authors
American Society of News Editors
Americans for Immigrant Justice
Association of Alternative Newsmedia
Association of Research Libraries
Bill of Rights Defense Committee/Defending
  Dissent Foundation
Bolo Bhi
Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of
  Law
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los
  Angeles
Center for Democracy & Technology
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
Committee to Protect Journalists
Computer & Communications Industry
  Association
The Constitution Project
Consumer Action
Council on American-Islamic Relations
Electronic Frontier Foundation
Engine
Free Speech Coalition
Future of Privacy Forum
Global Network Initiative
Human Rights Watch

Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee
  Rights
Immigrant Legal Resource Center
Index on Censorship
Internet Association
Internet Society
Internews
Legal Aid Justice Center
Media Freedom Foundation
National Coalition Against Censorship
National Consumers League
National Hispanic Media Coalition
New America's Open Technology Institute
Online Trust Alliance
Paradigm Initiative
Pen America
Project Censored
Public Citizen
Reporters Without Borders
Resilient Communities Program, New America
Restore the Fourth
United Church of Christ, OC Inc.
Woodhull Freedom Foundation
World Privacy Forum

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