

Coalition of Major Internet Companies and Advocates Rallies Around Surveillance Transparency Legislation

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As America and the world debate what level of government surveillance is acceptable in a 21st century democracy, there is at least one point of growing consensus between advocates, companies and policymakers: greater transparency around government surveillance is absolutely necessary to ensure accountability and prevent abuse of these ever-more powerful technologies.

Kevin Bankston, CDT Senior Counsel and Director of Free Expression

The Center for Democracy & Technology (CDT), on behalf of a broad coalition of Internet companies and advocates for free speech and privacy rights, today delivered a letter to the leaders of the US Senate and House Judiciary Committees supporting two bills that substantially increase transparency around government surveillance of the Internet. Many of the same companies, such as Apple and Twitter, along with groups like the Electronic Frontier Foundation and the American Civil Liberties Union, joined with CDT earlier this summer to send a letter to Congress pressing for the introduction of such legislation.

The new letter voices the signers' strong support for Senator Al Franken's S. 1452, the Surveillance Transparency Act of 2013, and Representative Zoe Lofgren's H.R. 3035, the Surveillance Order Reporting Act of 2013, each of which would clarify that companies have the right to publish basic statistics about the government demands for user data that they receive—including demands under FISA, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.

"Such transparency," says the letter, "is important not only for the American people, who are entitled to have an informed public debate about the appropriateness of that surveillance, but also for international users of U.S.-based service providers who are concerned about privacy and security." The letter, which asks the committee leaders to hold hearings on the transparency issue and move the bills forward, concludes with the signers voicing their eagerness to work together "to achieve passage of legislation that will ensure the level of transparency necessary to appropriately inform the American public and preserve the trust of Internet users around the world."

The letter comes on the same day that the U.S. Justice Department is expected to file a brief with the secretive FISA Court opposing motions by Google, Microsoft, Yahoo, Facebook, and LinkedIn asking the court to rule that they have a First Amendment right to publish FISA statistics. Those motions, all from companies who signed today's letter, were supported by a friend-of-the-court brief filed by a coalition of free speech organizations including CDT and led by the First Amendment Coalition. Meanwhile, Senators Wyden, Udall, Paul, and Blumenthal just last week introduced major surveillance reform legislation that included components of both the Lofgren and Franken transparency bills.

"As America and the world debate what level of government surveillance is acceptable in a 21st century democracy, there is at least one point of growing consensus between advocates, companies and policymakers: greater transparency around government surveillance is absolutely necessary to ensure accountability and prevent abuse of these ever-more powerful technologies," said Kevin Bankston, CDT Senior Counsel and Director of Free Expression, who has organized the coalition effort. "We are thankful that Congress is moving so quickly to ensure the level of transparency necessary to inform the American people and to restore the trust of Internet users around the world. Hopefully our efforts to achieve greater transparency around government surveillance will help spur broader reform of surveillance laws that have been misused to justify the bulk collection of data about masses of innocent people both in the United States and abroad."

A copy of today's letter is available [here](#) [1].

A copy of the coalition's previous letter, updated to reflect the latest signers, is available [here](#) [2].



A copy of the FISA court amicus brief filed by CDT and its allies is available [here](#) [3].

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