

Letter to Google on Location Data and Abortion Access

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Sundar Pichai
Chief Executive Officer
Google LLC

Dear Mr. Pichai:

We write to urge you to stop unnecessarily collecting and retaining customer location data, to prevent that information from being used to identify people who have obtained abortions.

The recent Supreme Court draft opinion shows that the constitutional right to safe, legal abortion — a fundamental right that Americans have known for half a century — is likely to be overturned. If this decision becomes final, many states that have trigger laws will immediately criminalize abortion and Congress may pass a law criminalizing abortion in all 50 states.

In a world in which abortion could be made illegal, Google's current practice of collecting and retaining extensive records of cell phone location data will allow it to become a tool for extremists looking to crack down on people seeking reproductive health care. That's because Google stores historical location information about hundreds of millions of smartphone users, which it routinely shares with government agencies.

While Google collects and retains customer location data for various business purposes, including to target online ads, Google is not the only entity to make use of this data. Law enforcement officials routinely obtain court orders forcing Google to turn over its customers' location information. This includes dragnet "geofence" orders demanding data about everyone who was near a particular location at a given time. In fact, according to data published by Google, one quarter of the law enforcement orders that your company receives each year are for these dragnet geofence orders; Google received 11,554 geofence warrants in 2020.

digital divide, in which privacy and security are made a luxury.

If abortion is made illegal by the Supreme Court and Congress, it is inevitable that prosecutors will use legal means to hunt down, prosecute and jail people for obtaining critical reproductive health care. The only way to protect your customers' location data from such outrageous government surveillance is to not keep it in the first place.

To that end, we urge you to promptly reform your data collection and retention practices, so that Google no longer collects unnecessary customer location data nor retains any non-aggregate location data about individual customers, whether in identifiable or anonymized form. Google cannot allow its online advertising-focused digital infrastructure to be weaponized against people seeking abortions.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

7amleh – The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media

Academy of Perinatal Harm Reduction

Access Now

Action Center on Race and the Economy

Advocacy for Principled Action in Government

Advocating Opportunity

AIDS Alabama

Amnesty International USA

CARES

Center for Digital Democracy

Consumer Action

Defending Rights & Dissent

Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC)

Elephant Circle

Fight for the Future

Free Press

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Global Voices

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Individual Privacy, RJ Attorney

Indivisible Bainbridge Island

Jacobs Institute of Women's Health

Liberate! Don't Incarcerate

Massachusetts Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus

NARAL Pro-Choice America
National Birth Equity Collaborative
New America's Open Technology Institute
North Kitsap Indivisible
Oakland Privacy
Pro-Choice Connecticut
Pro-Choice North Carolina
Pro-Choice Ohio
Pro-Choice Oregon
Pro-Choice Washington
Reframe Health and Justice
Reproductive Equity Now
Restore The Fourth
RootsAction Education Fund
S.T.O.P. – The Surveillance Technology Oversight Project
SumOfUs
SWOP Behind Bars, Inc
The Sex Workers Project of the Urban Justice Center
Transgender Law Center
WA People's Privacy Network
Whatcom Peace & Justice Center
Woodhull Freedom Foundation

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Elephant Circle
Fight for the Future
GLAAD
Global Voices
Hacking//Hustling
Individual Privacy, RJ Attorney
Indivisible Bainbridge Island
Jacobs Institute of Women's Health
Liberate! Don't Incarcerate
Media Alliance
MediaJustice
Movement for Family Power
NARAL Pro-Choice America
National Birth Equity Collaborative

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