

Federal Government Expands Database on Travelers

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ACLU calls on Congress to stop collection of data on innocent travelers

Once again the federal government is expanding its collection of data on innocent travelers, the American Civil Liberties Union said today, with the Department of Homeland Security creating dossiers of travelers who pass through U.S. border checkpoints, maintain these files for 15 years, and share this data broadly - including providing access to courts and attorneys in civil litigation like divorce proceedings.

'Our government is not supposed to collect information on the innocent activities and movements of its citizens just in case they later commit a crime,' said Barry Steinhardt, director of the ACLU's Technology and Liberty Program. 'This program illustrates why America needs more robust and across-the-board privacy laws.'

The DHS policy, which was reported by the Washington Post today, requires travelers at the border to present either a passport or both a drivers license and a birth certificate. The Customs and Border Protection agents scan information from travelers and store it on a database.

'The Customs and Border Protection Agency function is taking the approach that the border is a constitution-free zone,' said Tim Sparapani, Senior Legislative Counsel. 'Congress needs to step in and reassert the American values of limited intrusion on Americans' private lives.'

Sparapani continued, 'This is just the latest in a long list of Department of misguided DHS security policies, from trying to waive all laws at the border to build a US immigration wall, to redirecting the Automated Tracking System from assessing the risk of cargo to assessing the risk of travelers, to the most recent controversy over detaining laptops at airports. It is clear the next administration will need to drastically rethink all of these wrongheaded policies.'

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