

US House to examine bill setting new standards for biometric, digital privacy rights

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Government facial recognition regulations also advance in two states

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A Democratic lawmaker in the United States, Suzan DelBene, has reintroduced a private-members bill intended to boost consumer digital rights protection and create a uniform standard for online data privacy in all of the country, with significant implications for biometrics use.

According to several reports, the bill will be the federal government's first data privacy standard and will compel companies to be explicit about their privacy policies to users.

The bill, known as the Information and [Data Transparency Act](#), is said to already have support from tech organizations and is one of several privacy-related bills to be examined by House members in the months ahead, the reports note.

The draft legislation, will cover various areas of consumer data such as financial, health, genetic, biometric, geolocation, sexual orientation, citizenship and immigration status, religious beliefs and Social Security information, according to [Nextgov](#).

"Data privacy is a 21st Century issue of civil rights, civil liberties, and human rights and the U.S. has no policy to protect our most sensitive personal information from abuse. With states understandably advancing their own legislation in the absence of federal policy, Congress needs to prioritize creating a strong national standard to protect all Americans," Nextgov quoted DelBene as saying in a statement.

She added that the bill will provide the necessary critical protections, insisting that the U.S. must be able to have domestic data privacy policy so as to shape standards abroad and prevent others like the European Union from dictating the pace.

While the bill is expected to give users some level of control over biometrics and other data they share with industry, it is also expected to bolster the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) – the body that controls tech companies in the United States.

The bill will strengthen the FTC's rule-making body to better monitor changing digital right trends, and will require tech companies to submit to neutral third-party privacy audits every two years, the report adds. It will equally compel companies to disclose whether they share user information and how they do so, but will exempt small businesses from regular privacy practices audits.

The bill is coming at a time when the States of Virginia and California have moved ahead with laws which address digital privacy concerns, [CNBC](#) notes, but adds that the lawmaker proposing it thinks such a law should not be adopted on State-by-State basis.

“I understand why states are moving forward in the absence of the federal government moving, but I think it is much better to have a federal law versus a patchwork of laws,” CNBC quoted DelBene as saying in a recent virtual meeting with reporters.

The bill was first introduced in 2019 but it faced a hold-up as a number of changes had to be made to it following inputs from important stakeholders. DelBene said she is optimistic Congress would consider the digital privacy rights legislation this time around.

Utah closer to regulated govt use of facial recognition

A bill awaiting assent from Utah State Governor will regulate how government agencies can use citizens’ photos for face biometrics purposes in the State, [The Salt Lake Tribune](#) reports.

The bill was endorsed recently by lawmakers of the State after concerns were raised about how [federal law enforcement agencies had used facial recognition](#) technology to scan thousands of photos held by the State’s driver’s license database.

Under the bill, any government body wishing to use a person’s photo for facial recognition purposes will have to notify the person about how they want to make sure of the photo, the report adds. Also, such a notification must include a statement of the specific crime being investigated and an indication of how likely the person whose photo is to be compared is linked to the crime. It however does not give individuals the choice on whether to comply with such a request or not, the report indicates.

The new rules would also include mandatory training for employees using the biometric technology, and review of any match by at least two people.

The bill’s House sponsor Representative Travis Seegmiller highlighted the importance of such regulation saying although facial recognition technology is crucial for many law enforcement purposes, it is a powerful tool whose deployment has to be reasonably controlled.

The bill is said by the ACLU of Utah and Libertas Institute to have not go far enough, though they have supported it. Rep. Seegmiller said the bill is not perfect, but is the outcome of what the House was able to agree on. It passed the House unanimously and the State Senate by a 24 to 3 vote.

Nebraska public sector facial recognition ban looms

Obtaining, retaining, accessing or using facial recognition technology to identify individuals based on the physical characteristics of their face by government agencies in the State of Nebraska may soon be prohibited if a proposed bill goes through.

The draft piece of legislation sponsored by Senator Tony Vargas is coming on the heels of concerns about privacy and the technology’s alleged bias, according to local ABC affiliate [KLKN Channel 8 News](#).

The bill also states that any evidence collected using facial recognition technology inadmissible for any legal proceedings, though that is not a change from current practice. In the event that lawmakers pass the proposed legislation, individuals can initiate civil action against any government entity that violates it.

According to the report, the bill has sparked mixed reactions from some quarters especially from law enforcement officers who argue that facial recognition technology is an important part of their investigative process.

“Police can’t write a warrant based solely on facial recognition, but we rather can utilize the software to generate leads and inform individuals as potential matches... This technology must be used appropriately within constitutional guidelines. We would advocate for legislation to properly balance its use, but eliminating the tool as an investigative resource would be detrimental to public safety,” an officer with the Omaha Police Department told Channel 8 News.

The Omaha Police Department used face biometrics 68 times last year.