



August 22, 2016

## Restore the Fourth Declares Opposition to Department of Homeland Security's Social Media Screening Plan

### **DHS proposal to collect social media data from visa-waiver travelers is invasive, costly, and ineffective**

Belmont, MA – A new Department of Homeland Security [proposal](#), currently under review, asks that visitors entering the United States under the Visa Waiver Program disclose Facebook, Twitter, and other online usernames in order to facilitate government analysis of all visa-waiver applicants' social media activity and connections. Today, Restore the Fourth and a coalition of over two dozen human rights and civil liberties organizations sent a [letter](#) to U.S. Customs and Border Protection outlining the program's disproportionate risks, excessive costs, and other serious shortcomings as well as encouraging CBP to dismiss the proposal. As our letter explains, the proposed program would "invade individual privacy and imperil freedom of expression while being ineffective and prohibitively expensive to implement and maintain."

To begin, the collection of online identity data would offer DHS a window into travelers' private lives as well as provoke the expansion of unwarranted surveillance activity. Moreover, an online identity data collection program - while enforced on all visa-waiver applicants in theory - will likely exacerbate existing discrimination against Arab and Muslim travelers by inviting contextless scrutiny of these visitors' social media content. Moreover, this "disparate impact will affect not only travelers from visa-waiver program countries, but also the Arab-Americans and Muslim Americans whose colleagues, family members, business associates, and others in their social networks are exposed to immediate scrutiny or ongoing surveillance, or are improperly denied a visa waiver because of their online presence."

In addition to the program's negative consequences for privacy and freedom of expression, the collection of travelers' social media usernames will also prove to be a strikingly ineffective method of detecting genuine national security risks as "individuals who pose a threat to the United States are highly unlikely to volunteer online identifiers tied to information that would raise questions about their admissibility to the United States." The proposed screening methods will instead yield a flood of social media data, data unlikely to generate any actionable intelligence, and lead to an escalation of costs that would "render the proposal prohibitively expensive and with no conclusive benefits to the mission of

DHS.” As such, we join our 27 partners in asking that CBP decline to implement this invasive, costly, and ineffective program.

**For Letter:**

[http://restorethe4th.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/DHS\\_Social\\_Media\\_Screening.pdf](http://restorethe4th.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/DHS_Social_Media_Screening.pdf)

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