



ELECTRONIC FRONTIER FOUNDATION

Protecting Rights and Promoting Freedom on the Electronic Frontier

January 26, 2017

The Honorable Ricardo Lara
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 5050
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SB 31 – SUPPORT

Dear Senator Lara:

On behalf of the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), I write to inform you that we strongly support SB 31, as amended on January 24. Now more than ever, the State of California must protect religious and other minorities from database abuse by the federal government.

EFF is a member-supported, nonprofit civil liberties organization that protects free speech and privacy rights in the digital world. EFF was founded in 1990, is headquartered in San Francisco, and has over 33,000 members.

Governments gather all manner of personal information from members of the public, often for seemingly benevolent purposes, and store it in databases. All too often, governments proceed to reuse that personal information in a manner that hurts these same people. Vulnerable subpopulations suffer most frequently from such database abuse.

The original sin at the dawn of our nation's database era is the shameful use of stored personal information to round up and intern Japanese Americans during World War II. Specifically, the U.S. Census Bureau shared its supposedly confidential data about the names and addresses of Japanese Americans with the military officials in charge of internment. While the government initially gathered this personal information for a legitimate purpose, the government wrongfully diverted it to an illegitimate purpose.

Today, many Muslim Americans and their allies fear that the federal government will abuse government databases to implement the President's campaign pledge to build a Muslim registry. State and local governments in California possess myriad databases that the federal government might try to

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use to locate and list immigrants. Many California agencies (including police, human services, and universities) gather and store a host of personal information (including names, addresses, and social security numbers) from vast numbers of people. Federal data miners could abuse these California databases to pursue Muslims.

SB 31 would stop this from happening. Specifically, it would prohibit all of California's state and local government agencies from providing personal information from their databases to the federal government for purposes of creating or enforcing a list, registry, or database based on religion, ethnicity, or national origin.

Thank you for your authorship of SB 31, and for your leadership in the fight against database abuse of Muslims and others. EFF strongly supports SB 31. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at (415) 436-9333, extension 176, or to email me at adam@eff.org.

Sincerely,

Adam Schwartz
Senior Staff Attorney