

Lawmakers say UK's draft online spying law needs changes

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The British government is under pressure to amend a contentious Internet surveillance bill after a parliamentary committee said plans to make service providers retain all users' data have not been adequately thought through.

If approved by Parliament, the Investigatory Powers Bill will give police and spies broad powers to obtain Internet connection records—a list of websites, apps and messaging services someone has visited, though not the individual pages they looked at or the messages they sent. It will also require telecommunications companies to keep records of customers' Web histories for up to a year and to help security services gain access to suspects' electronic devices.

A committee set up to scrutinize the legislation said Thursday that communications data was an important tool for fighting crime and terrorism. But the committee said it "has not been persuaded that enough work has been done to conclusively prove the case" for retaining Internet connection records.

Committee chairman Paul Murphy, a Labour member of the House of Lords, said the bill had many positive features, but the government "has a significant amount of further work to do before Parliament can be confident that the provisions have been fully thought through."

Earlier this week another group of lawmakers, the Intelligence and Security Committee, said the bill did too little to protect individuals'

privacy.

The bill is intended to replace a patchwork of laws, some dating from the Web's infancy, and set the limits of surveillance in the digital age. But civil liberties groups say it grants spy agencies powers that are far too sweeping.

Internet companies including Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Twitter and Yahoo have also raised concerns. The firms are especially concerned that the measures could weaken encryption, which is key to ensuring online shopping and other activities can be conducted securely.

Thursday's report said the bill should make it explicit that firms will not be expected to provide decrypted copies of communications "if it is not practicable for them to do so."

James Blessing, chairman of the Internet Service Providers' Association, said the report "adds to the chorus of voices calling for the Home Office to change the legislation so it's feasible, proportionate and does not harm the U.K. Internet industry."

Home Secretary Theresa May said the government would "carefully consider" the committees' recommendations before setting out final proposals in the spring.

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