Protest targets US cyber intelligence legislation

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Civil liberties groups on Monday launched protests targeting proposed US cyber intelligence law that they fear would let police freely dip into people's private online information.

The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) and Reporters Without Borders were among organizations that signaled the start of a week of Internet protests against the Cyber Intelligence Sharing and Protection Act (CISPA).

"A blanket monitoring system is never an appropriate solution," Reporters Without Borders said in a release calling for Congress to reject the CISPA legislation introduced in November of last year.

"Freedom of expression and the protection of online privacy are increasingly under threat in democratic countries, where a series of bills and draft laws is sacrificing them in the interests of national security or copyright."

The EFF released an online tool for US residents to find Twitter accounts of their representatives in Congress to target messages about the threat CISPA poses to privacy in day-to-day lives.

"CIPSA would allow ISPs, social networking sites, and anyone else handling Internet communications to monitor users and pass information to the government without any judicial oversight," said EFF activism director Rainey Reitman.

"The language of this bill is dangerously vague, so that personal online activity -- from the mundane to the intimate -- could be implicated."

The Twitter portion of the online campaign included creating #CongressTMI (an acronym for Too Much Information) and #CISPA "hashtags" to be added to messages to make it easier to find "tweets" about the topic.

Organizations plan to augment the online campaign with old-fashioned ink-and-paper letters sent to legislators by post and articles detailing reasoning behind opposing the bill.

"We need cybersecurity legislation, not surveillance legislation," said Center for Democracy and Technology president Leslie Harris.

Groups involved in the protest include Constitution Project; Fight for the Future, and the American Civil Liberties Union.

"Some people believe that we have to sacrifice civil liberties in order to shore up cybersecurity, but that's misunderstanding both issues," said EFF Senior Staff Attorney Lee Tien.

"Giving companies carte blanche to bypass federal law does not make us safer -- it puts us at more risk."

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