

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Innovation, Data and Commerce Ranking Member Jan Schakowsky

Innovation, Data, and Commerce Subcommittee Hearing on “Legislative Solutions to Protect Kids Online and Ensure Americans’ Data Privacy Rights”

April 17, 2024

I’d like to start by saying how happy I am to get back to legislation to protect American’s data privacy. This is an issue we have been working on for more than four years. It is past time to get it done.

The need to act is urgent: Americans depend on the internet to connect, work, learn, and share their lives. But when it comes to safeguarding their own personal information, most Americans feel helpless. Companies track some of consumers’ most personal information like where they go, who they talk to, their physical and mental health, and their religion. Then data brokers sell this invasive surveillance to the highest bidder.

Increasingly, this data is used to decide what products consumers see, what price they are quoted, and what opportunities they qualify for. Big Tech over and over has apologized for their failures. But families across our country remain incredibly frustrated. Their digital lives become Big Tech’s profits, often at the expense of their kids.

Almost 80% of people across the world are protected by a national privacy law, but Americans are not. Just since 2022, twelve states have passed new state privacy laws. The bipartisan, bicameral “American Privacy Rights Act” from Chair Rodgers is a significant step forward. I’d like to thank her for her tireless work.

This bill builds on our privacy work last Congress in this Subcommittee. Under this bill, consumers will no longer be forced to accept take-it-or-leave-it terms in exchange for their privacy. Companies will no longer be allowed to collect endless amounts of consumer data. Data brokers will no longer be able to help scammers find victims by selling lists like “Suffering Seniors” or “Credit Crunched.” Consumers will be able to opt out of an algorithm deciding if they can access housing, employment, or healthcare.

But we still have work to do. In particular, I want to make sure that we are providing strong protections for data like your fingerprints or DNA. And let’s make sure to build on the strong civil rights protections in this bill.

Finally, we must do more to reign in the data brokers most Americans have never even heard of. The American people have already waited long enough—in fact, we are in overtime. Now is the moment to ensure our constituents have the rights and protections they deserve.

I’d like to thank my colleagues for all their hard work on the bills on this hearing. Let us seize this moment to return control of their data back to the American people.