

## **Privacy versus Security: What is CISPA?**

The Cyber Intelligence Sharing and Protection Act (CISPA) is a proposed law in the United States which would allow for the sharing of Internet traffic information between the U.S. government and technology and manufacturing companies. The stated aim of the bill is to help the U.S. government investigate cyber threats and ensure the security of networks against cyber attacks. While CISPA gives the government tools to fight Cyber Crime, it also threatens the online privacy of the general public. It would allow private sector firms to search personal and sensitive user data of ordinary US residents, and to then share that information with each other and the US government — without the need for a warrant. The US government can do anything they like with the data, so long as it's lawful and pertains to "cyber security purposes", rather than "national security" purposes. But because the language is so ill defined, it could be used for many more reasons than were initially considered.

CISPA circumvents existing privacy laws, such as the Wiretap Act and the Stored Communications Act. It has been widely criticized by advocates of Internet privacy and civil liberties. Those groups argue CISPA contains too few limits on how and when the government may monitor a private individual's Internet browsing information. What sparked significant privacy worries is the section of CISPA that says "notwithstanding any other provision of law," companies may share information "with any other entity, including the federal government." By including the word "notwithstanding," CISPA is intended to trump all existing federal and state civil and criminal laws.

It was passed in the House of Representatives on April 26, 2012, but was not passed by the U.S. Senate as of yet. The sponsors of the bill are planning to amend the bill to address many of the concerns raised, so we may not see the end of CISPA for some time. Regardless of your stance on this issue, it is important to educate yourself, because the outcome can affect us all.