

11 DEC 2017



Home Office

Rt Hon Ben Wallace MP
Minister of State for Security

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Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP
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2[✓] November 2017

Dear Alistair,

Thank you for your email of 12 November to the Secretary of State for the Home Department on behalf of Mr Phil Thane of 51B King Street, Potton, SG19 2QZ regarding end to end encryption of communications. I am replying as the Minister of State for Security.

The British Government is in favour of strong encryption: it is critical to protect UK citizens from harm online and billions of people use it every day for a range of services including banking, commerce and communications. We strongly support a free, open and secure internet and we continue to make significant international commitments to protect and defend citizens' freedom to express themselves online and their right to privacy.

However, like many powerful technologies, encrypted services are abused by a small minority of people. There is a particular problem with end-to-end encryption where certain providers have deliberately designed their systems so that even they cannot see the content of the message.

The fact that our agencies are unable to access end-to-end encrypted messages sent by terrorists and serious criminals – even with a warrant signed off by a Secretary of State and, under the Investigatory Powers Act, a senior judge – is a real problem for investigations today. If our law enforcement or security and intelligence agencies cannot see what a terrorist or criminal is planning then they cannot stop them.

We do not want unfettered access to all communications but we do need to ensure our law enforcement agencies are able to gain lawful and exceptional access to the communications they need to keep us safe. We want to work with service providers to fulfil our collective responsibility to protect us from terrorists and those who commit serious crimes, while allowing providers to protect user privacy. This is not about creating so-called "backdoors" or banning encryption.

A mature dialogue between Government and industry on this issue is crucial, and we expect them to live up to those responsibilities, working with law enforcement where there is a warrant authorised by a Secretary of State and approved by a senior judge.

The Government intends to work with the technology companies to better understand the decisions they have made whilst implementing encryption within their services. Our technical experts believe this may identify opportunities that, without compromising wider safety and security of systems for lawful users, can provide ways to gain specific, targeted and lawful access to information about what serious criminals and terrorists are doing online.

The responsibility for tackling this threat at every level lies with both Governments and industry. It is crucial that companies acknowledge the vital role they have to play.

Yours

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Wallace". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Rt Hon Ben Wallace MP