



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON  
**SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY**

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## Opening Statement

**Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)**

Investigations & Oversight Subcommittee Hearing:  
*Privacy in the Age of Biometrics*

June 29, 2022

Good morning to our panelists, and thank you to Chairman Foster for holding this hearing.

Biometric technologies are in many of the devices we use every day. They allow us to open our phones with a facial image match or access sensitive areas with a fingerprint. The applications are vast and continue to expand with new technological breakthroughs and innovative ideas. There is still a lot of work to be done to address accuracy and bias in biometric technologies. But in recent years, the accuracy of these technologies – particularly facial recognition – has improved by leaps and bounds. And as biometric technologies become both more accurate and more pervasive society, we must ensure they do not violate our fundamental rights to privacy. It is our responsibility as policymakers to look after the privacy of American citizens – a public good which may not always be appropriately valued in the marketplace.

This responsibility includes monitoring federal agencies' approach to privacy in their own biometrics programs. The U.S. government can use technology solutions to maximize both security and privacy. We are pleased to have Ms. Wright from the Government Accountability Office with us today to share GAO's findings about the prevalence of facial recognition technology within federal agencies. GAO has conducted a volume of exemplary analysis on how well agencies are observing best practices and technical standards for privacy in general.

And defining what is private in the digital age is complex. Here on the Science Committee, which I often call the committee of the future, we are poised to rise to the challenge. What does it mean if I upload an image for verification and change my mind? How long does a company get to keep my image? If I supply my voice to a video, should a third party be able to buy my voice print without my consent? It is important to acknowledge that the privacy implications from one biometric application to another can vary widely.

This Committee is taking steps to dedicate more research attention to this issue. The America COMPETES Act, currently in conference with the Senate, includes the NIST for the Future Act,

which passed through this Committee on a bipartisan basis. This critical legislation directs NIST to formalize a measurement research program and work on performance standards for biometric identification systems. It directs NIST to establish common definitions for these systems, including privacy and consent. It would also dedicate more resources to a central theme of today's hearing, privacy-enhancing technologies, or P-E-Ts. Our Committee has advanced another bipartisan bill, the Promoting Digital Privacy Technologies Act, that would dedicate more resources at the National Science Foundation for research on privacy enhancing technologies.

PETs are critical to the ethical use of biometrics. I am proud of my colleagues on this Committee for their hard work on these bills. I hope today's discussion will help invigorate our resolve to get them over the finish line and signed into law.

The technology opportunity around PETs is exciting. But the political moment for privacy is grave. Last week, the Supreme Court created a moment of reckoning for reproductive rights – for human rights – in America. Central to this fight is the right to make decisions about bodily autonomy and the right to privacy. We must ensure that the biometric data of U.S. citizens are not abused by bad actors or companies who intend to put profit over privacy.

I yield back.