

House of Commons

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Charlie Angus

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Daniel Therrien
Privacy Commissioner of Canada
30 Victoria Street, 1st floor
Gatineau, Québec K1A 1H3

Monday, January 27th, 2020

Re: Possible Use of Facial Recognition Technology

Dear Commissioner Therrien,

I am writing to you today regarding the use of facial recognition technology by law enforcement agencies in Canada. Recent media reports indicate that police forces are using facial recognition technology in multiple jurisdictions across North America. The US-based company Clearview AI is offering its services to various police forces. At this time, the RCMP has refused to state whether or not they are using this technology. If they are, it could represent a real risk to Canadians' privacy. That a private US-based company could obtain access to Canadians' personal information without obtaining their consent is deeply concerning.

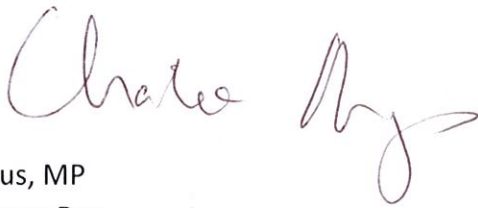
Facial recognition technologies have been shown to result in false identifications and have sometimes been found to be biased against specific visible minorities or social classes. But the power of this technology to radically alter the basic notions of privacy is evident. It is therefore very worrisome that the leading proponent Clearview AI is based in the US and would not be subject to Canadian privacy laws if data is being kept in another jurisdiction. The potential for abuse is enormous.

In Canada, there have been important Indigenous-led protests against mega-resource projects, and there is a history of distrust between those participating in social protest and the RCMP. Could technology such as Clearview AI be used to identify protesters and create profiles of civic dissent? Given the power of these technologies, we have to be vigilant. At this time, Canadian law enforcement agencies and Clearview AI remain quite tight-lipped about the extent of their collaboration. It is imperative that we understand more about how this technology may be used on Canadians, and for what ends.

Any use of such technology must be carried out under clear judicial oversight. However, this technology is being tested and implemented in a legislative and judicial vacuum. To this end, I ask you to launch an inquiry as to whether the RCMP or other police forces are using services such as Clearview AI. I am asking you to provide recommendations on the permissibility, limits and scope of use of facial recognition by law enforcement agencies.

I look forward to your response and to continuing to work together to protect Canadians' privacy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Charlie Angus", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Charlie Angus, MP
Timmins-James Bay