The Honorable James L. Robart

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON
AT SEATTLE

MICROSOFT CORPORATION, Plaintiff, v. THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, and LORETTA LYNCH, in her official capacity as Attorney General of the United States, Defendants.	Case No. 2:16-cv-00538-JLR **BRIEF OF *AMICI CURIAE* ELECTRONIC FRONTIER FOUNDATION, ACCESS NOW, NEW AMERICA'S OPEN TECHNOLOGY INSTITUTE, AND JENNIFER GRANICK IN SUPPORT OF PLAINTIFF'S OPPOSITION TO GOVERNMENT'S MOTION TO DISMISS**

Amici curiae Electronic Frontier Foundation, Access Now, New America's Open Technology Institute, and Jennifer Granick submit this *amicus* brief in support of Plaintiff Microsoft Corporation's Opposition to Government's Motion to Dismiss [Dkt. 38]. We have separately requested leave to file this *amicus* brief pursuant to this Court's order on August 23, 2016 [Dkt. 42].

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DISCLOSURE OF CORPORATE AFFILIATIONS AND OTHER ENTITIES WITH A DIRECT FINANCIAL INTEREST IN LITIGATION

Pursuant to Rule 26.1 of the Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure, *amici curiae* Electronic Frontier Foundation, Access Now, and New America's Open Technology Institute state that they do not have a parent corporation, and that no publicly held corporation owns 10% or more of the stock of *amici*.

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INTEREST OF *AMICI*[1]

Amici are non-profit organizations and a legal scholar that operate at the intersection of civil liberties and technology. Representing the interests of technology users in the courts and through legislative and policy advocacy, our priority is to ensure that constitutional rights keep pace with innovation. We are particularly concerned when the interplay between law and technology prevents individuals from defending their constitutional rights. At issue in this case is the use by millions of people of "cloud" services to store highly personal and confidential information, and the applicability of a law—the Stored Communications Act (SCA), part of the Electronic Communications Privacy Act (ECPA)—that governs government access to such information, but makes it nearly impossible for the creators of that information to challenge government searches and seizures under the Fourth Amendment.

INTRODUCTION

Fundamental to protection of the Fourth Amendment is the rule that the government must notify those whose privacy it invades, ensuring that it provides aggrieved persons with the knowledge needed to contest the lawfulness of government searches and seizures. While government notice has been a regular and constitutionally required feature of search and seizure warrants since the nation's founding, notice is especially important today for a simple reason: with the rise of the Internet and cloud services, private communications and information are stored in places where the parties to those communications and the owners or creators of that information cannot independently know whether the government has violated their Fourth Amendment rights. Dkt. # 28, Microsoft First Amended Complaint ¶ 3 ("FAC").

Amici support Microsoft's argument that 18 U.S.C. § 2703 "is facially unconstitutional to the extent it absolves the government of the obligation to give notice to a customer whose content it obtains by warrant, without regard to the circumstances of the particular case." FAC ¶

[1] No party or party's counsel participated in the writing of the brief in whole or in part. No party, party's counsel or other person contributed money to fund the preparation or submission of the brief.

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35. Section 2703 governs government access to information stored in the cloud, yet it expressly authorizes no-notice warrants. *See* 18 U.S.C. § 2703(b)(1)(A) ("without required notice to the subscriber or customer, if the governmental entity obtains a warrant").

Amici argue that the Fourth Amendment's protection against unreasonable searches and seizures by the government broadly applies to digital information, including that stored in the cloud by third-party providers for the benefit of their customers. We also argue that the failure of the SCA to require government notice to targets of warrants for digital search and seizure violates the Fourth Amendment's reasonableness requirement.[2] That the government can obtain information from Microsoft or other cloud providers without disturbing the targets of investigations is a mere happenstance of modern technology and social practices that cannot affect the notice requirement.

[2] *Amici* believe that searches and seizures of communications content and records under subpoenas or court orders not based on probable cause are also subject to the notice requirement. *See, e.g., City of Los Angeles v. Patel*, 135 S. Ct. 2443, 2453 (2015) (subpoena recipient's opportunity to "move to quash the subpoena before any search takes place" protects his or her Fourth Amendment rights, thus implying required government notice). But *amici* limit their argument here to the warranted searches and seizures challenged by Microsoft.

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ARGUMENT

I. THE FOURTH AMENDMENT PROTECTS DIGITAL CONTENT

The content of communications are protected by the Fourth Amendment. This is true even when content is held by a third party, thus making the "third-party doctrine"[3] immaterial in this case. Almost 140 years ago, the Supreme Court ruled that the Fourth Amendment protected the content of letters sent in the postal mail from warrantless government search while in transit. *Ex Parte Jackson*, 96 U.S. 727, 733 (1877); *People v. Superior Court of Butte County*, 275 Cal. App. 2d 489, 496 (1969) ("first class mail is sacrosanct"); *United States v. Jacobsen*, 466 U.S. 109, 114 (1984) ("Letters and other sealed packages are in the general class of effects in which the public at large has a legitimate expectation of privacy; warrantless searches of such effects are presumptively unreasonable."). Nearly a century later, the Court ruled that a person making a phone call on a public pay phone was entitled to expect the conversation would remain private. *Katz v. United States*, 389 U.S. 347 (1967). *See also Berger v. State of New York*, 388 U.S. 41 (1967).

In *Katz*, the Supreme Court articulated two core principles of Fourth Amendment jurisprudence. First, "the Fourth Amendment protects people, not places." *Katz*, 389 U.S. at 351. Second, the Fourth Amendment must be interpreted expansively to protect the privacy of communications. Although *Olmstead v. United States*, 277 U.S. 438 (1928), had held that wiretaps are not governed by the Fourth Amendment because they involve no "trespass" upon property, the Supreme Court overruled *Olmstead* largely because "[t]o read the Constitution more narrowly is to ignore the vital role that the public telephone has come to play in private communication." *Katz*, 389 U.S. at 352.[4]

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[3] *See generally Smith v. Maryland*, 442 U.S. 735 (1979).

[4] In *United States v. Jones*, 132 S. Ct. 945 (2012), the Court explained that government conduct can constitute a Fourth Amendment search either when it infringes on a reasonable expectation of privacy or when it involves a physical intrusion (a trespass) on a constitutionally protected space or thing for the purpose of obtaining information. The Court stated, "Fourth Amendment rights do not rise or fall with the *Katz* formulation … for most of our history the Fourth Amendment was understood to embody a particular concern for government trespass upon the

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Today, the Internet and its ability to host "cloud" content plays a "vital role" in private communication. Federal courts across the country have applied the principles of *Katz* and reached the same result when considering digital content, finding that individuals can expect their emails and private social media conversations to remain private. *United States v. Warshak*, 631 F.3d 266 (6th Cir. 2010) (reasonable expectation of privacy in emails); *R.S. ex rel. S.S. v. Minnewaska Area Sch. Dist. No. 2149*, 894 F.Supp.2d 1128, 1132 (D. Minn. 2012) (reasonable expectation of privacy in private Facebook messages); *United States v. Ali*, 870 F.Supp.2d 10, 39 n. 39 (D. D.C. 2012) (reasonable expectation of privacy in emails). In *Warshak*, the Sixth Circuit held that there exists a reasonable expectation of privacy in the content of emails stored in the cloud by a commercial third-party service provider, and thus the Fourth Amendment requires that the government obtain a warrant based on probable cause before accessing such emails. *Warshak*, 631 F.3d at 288. The court further held Section 2703 unconstitutional to the extent it permits the government to obtain the content of communications without a warrant if those communications are older than 180 days. *See* 18 U.S.C. § 2703(a).[5] Additionally, the Ninth Circuit recently held that "[p]ersonal email can, and often does, contain all the information once found in the 'papers and effects' mentioned explicitly in the Fourth Amendment," and therefore the accountholder "has a strong claim to a legitimate expectation of privacy in his personal email, given the private information it likely contains." *In re Grand Jury Subpoena, JK-15-029 v. Kitzhaber,* 2016 WL 3745541, at *5 (9th Cir. 2016). *See also United States v. Forrester*, 512

areas ('persons, houses, papers, and effects') it enumerates. *Katz* did not repudiate that understanding." *Id.* at 950. Thus government searches of emails and other communications may also qualify as the type of "trespass" that the framers sought to prevent when they adopted the Fourth Amendment.

[5] *Amici* contend that government surveillance authorized by the SCA is both a search and a seizure of communications. *See United States v. Comprehensive Drug Testing, Inc.*, 621 F.3d 1162, 1171-72, 1176 (9th Cir. 2010) (*en banc*) (*per curiam*) (describing the government's copying of electronic data as a seizure); *Katz*, 389 U.S. at 354 (describing the government's recording of a phone call as a "search and seizure").

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F.3d 500, 511 (9th Cir. 2008) (emails contain "content that the sender presumes will be read only by the intended recipient").

Indeed, the government agrees that a reasonable expectation of privacy attaches to cloud content, thus a warrant is required. In May 2013, then-Attorney General Eric Holder testified that "having a warrant to obtain the content of communication from a service provider is something that we support." *Oversight of the United States Department of Justice, Hearing Before the House Committee on the Judiciary*, Serial No. 113–43, at 87 (May 15, 2013).[6]

II. THE NOTICE REQUIREMENT APPLIES TO DIGITAL SEARCHES AND SEIZURES

When the Fourth Amendment was adopted, government threats to privacy and property were generally physical. And it was almost inherent in such searches and seizures that the target would know that the sanctity of her private life had been invaded. Yet the government can now intrude on a person's privacy or property whether or not the person knows of the intrusion. As Justice Brandeis warned, "Subtler and more far-reaching means of invading privacy have become available to the Government. . . . Ways may some day be developed by which the Government, without removing papers from secret drawers, can reproduce them in court, and by which it will be enabled to expose to a jury the most intimate occurrences of the home." *Olmstead*, 277 U.S. at 473-74 (Brandeis, J., dissenting).

With the pervasiveness of cloud computing, "some day" is here. And today, as always, the notice requirement must reach as far as the Fourth Amendment itself does.

In *Wilson v. Arkansas*, 514 U.S. 927 (1995), the Supreme Court made clear that governmental provision of notice to targets of physical search or seizure "forms a part of the reasonableness inquiry under the Fourth Amendment." *Id.* at 929. Prior or contemporaneous notice need not always be given, but it is the default rule. *See Richards v. Wisconsin*, 520 U.S. 385, 387 (1997) ("the Fourth Amendment incorporates the common law requirement that police officers entering a dwelling must knock on the door and announce their identity and purpose

[6] https://judiciary.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/113-43-80973-1.pdf.

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1 before attempting forcible entry"); *Hudson v. Michigan*, 547 U.S. 586, 589 (2006) ("The
2 common-law principle that law enforcement officers must announce their presence and provide
3 residents an opportunity to open the door is an ancient one."); *United States v. Freitas*, 800 F.2d
4 1451, 1456 (9th Cir. 1986) (finding sneak-and-peek warrant "constitutionally defective in failing
5 to provide explicitly for notice within a reasonable, but short, time subsequent to the surreptitious
6 entry").

7 Because the notice requirement is a component of the reasonableness analysis, not of the
8 Warrant Clause, it applies to the entire range of Fourth Amendment activities, including
9 electronic searches conducted outside the home. For electronic eavesdropping, where "success
10 depends on secrecy," the Supreme Court condemned a statute used to authorize surveillance of a
11 business office for having "no requirement for notice as do conventional warrants, nor does it
12 overcome this defect by requiring some showing of special facts." *Berger*, 388 U.S. at 60.
13 Indeed, the *Berger* Court declared, "Such a showing of exigency, in order to avoid notice, would
14 appear more important in eavesdropping, with its inherent dangers, than that required when
15 conventional procedures of search and seizure are utilized." *Id.* Government notice to the
16 surveillance target therefore cannot be dismissed as a mere fortuity of physical searches or
17 seizures that occur within the person's sphere of awareness. Instead, to the extent that electronic
18 surveillance was effectively invisible, and that prior notice could not be given, the Fourth
19 Amendment requires government notice once any exigency justifying delay had lapsed. *Katz*,
20 389 U.S. at 355, n.16.

21 The federal Wiretap Act, largely inspired by *Berger*, unsurprisingly requires post-
22 surveillance government notice to targets of interception orders. 18 U.S.C. § 2518(8)(d). *See also*
23 *Dalia v. United States*, 441 U.S. 238, 248 (1979) (permitting covert entry into a business office
24 in order to plant listening device, but noting "that Title III provided a constitutionally adequate
25 substitute for advance notice by requiring that, once the surveillance operation is completed, the
26 authorizing judge must cause notice to be served on those subjected to surveillance"); *United*
27 *States v. Donovan*, 429 U.S. 413, 430 (1977) ("The *Berger* and *Katz* decisions established that

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1 notice of surveillance is a constitutional requirement of any surveillance statute.") (quoting
2 legislative history of Title III).

3 *Berger* and *Dalia* prove that the notice requirement is not limited to physical search and
4 seizure cases of homes and businesses. The familiar "knock-and-announce" requirement is
5 merely a species of the more general notice requirement. The government has a default duty to
6 notify the persons whose privacy it invades, and courts craft that notice requirement in light of
7 the characteristics of the type of surveillance, preserving the values protected by government
8 notice while accommodating the legitimate interests of law enforcement. *Richards*, 520 U.S. at
9 394. Thus, the government is incorrect to argue that notice to Microsoft—as the recipient of the
10 legal process, rather than the person whose privacy is invaded—is sufficient to satisfy the Fourth
11 Amendment. Dkt. 38 at 22.

12 **III. SECTION 2703 IS UNCONSTITUTIONAL TO THE EXTENT IT AUTHORIZES**
13 **NO-NOTICE WARRANTS FOR DIGITAL CONTENT STORED BY THIRD PARTIES**

14 If the government intrudes into a person's office to seize documents from a cabinet or
15 device, the government clearly has a default obligation to provide notice of its presence and
16 authority, subject to recognized judicial exceptions for exigency. But under the SCA, the
17 government not only has no baseline duty to notify the person, it can also gag the service
18 provider. 18 U.S.C. § 2705(b). Persons should not be deprived of notice, and the government
19 should not be excused from providing notice, merely because they use cloud services to store
20 their private communications and information. *Riley v. California*, 134 S. Ct. 2473, 2494-95
21 (2014) ("that technology now allows an individual to carry … in his hand" a cell phone
22 containing "the privacies of life" "does not make the information any less worthy of the
23 protection for which the Founders fought") (internal quotation marks and citations omitted);
24 *Kyllo v. United States*, 533 U.S. 27, 34 (2001) (when confronted by new technologies, courts
25 must "assure[] preservation of that degree of privacy against government that existed when the
26 Fourth Amendment was adopted"). In short, "technology matters." *United States v. Cotterman*,
27 709 F.3d 952, 965 (9th Cir. 2013) (*en banc*).

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1 Moreover, that the SCA expressly authorizes no-notice warrants in general alone renders
2 it unconstitutional under the Fourth Amendment, because the statute creates a prohibited blanket
3 exception to the notice requirement by insulating an entire category of searches from judicial
4 review. *Richards*, 520 U.S. at 388, 394 (rejecting blanket notice exception for all felony drug
5 investigations and stating, "in each case, it is the duty of a court confronted with the question to
6 determine whether the facts and circumstances of the particular entry justified dispensing with
7 the knock-and-announce requirement").
8 Equally important, reasons for dispensing with the notice requirement recognized in other
9 contexts are largely inapplicable to the digital searches and seizures authorized by the SCA. For
10 instance, the knock-and-announce requirement for prior or contemporaneous notice may "give
11 way under circumstances presenting a threat of physical violence or where police officers have
12 reason to believe that evidence would likely be destroyed if advance notice were given."
13 *Richards*, 520 U.S at 391 (internal quotation marks and citation omitted). But for searches under
14 the SCA, where the warrant is served on an electronic communications service or remote
15 computing service provider—not directly on the person or persons whose privacy is invaded—
16 there is no threat of physical violence remotely comparable to that of an armed homeowner
17 overreacting to police at the door. Nor is there any realistic chance that digital content will be
18 destroyed were notice given to the target. The SCA expressly authorizes the government to
19 compel service providers to preserve evidence even before a warrant is presented. 18 U.S.C. §
20 2703(f).
21 Privacy, of course, is the key value here. Searches and seizures intrude on Fourth
22 Amendment privacy as well as property interests, whether or not the person knows of them.[7] In
23
24 [7] First Amendment rights are also implicated. While Microsoft champions its First Amendment
rights to inform its users of government intrusions, the knowledge that the government searches
25 and seizes our communications—but does not notify us—produces the worst kind of chilling
effect, a general awareness of widespread surveillance with no particular knowledge of who is
26 being watched. *United States v. Jones*, 132 S. Ct. 945, 956 (2012) (Sotomayor, J., concurring)
("Awareness that the Government may be watching chills associational and expressive
27 freedoms.").

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today's world of communications intermediaries and digital information, that concern is far greater than before, because we cannot know about a government search or seizure of digital information in the first place unless the government tells us (or allows the intermediary to do so). And we cannot challenge such searches as unlawful without such knowledge. *See United States v. Eastman*, 465 F.2d 1057, 1063, n.13 (3d Cir. 1972) (Wiretap Act notice provision "intended to provide the defendant whose telephone has been subject to wiretap an opportunity to test the validity of the wiretapping authorization").

Notice does not only promote government accountability for those who are targets. If a target's emails are searched and seized, every party to those emails has also had his or her privacy invaded. Notice to the target will promote accountability for them as well. More generally, notice safeguards the greater cause of public accountability. Targets can challenge government action with fuller information about why and how government conducts surveillance—information that can lead to judicial, congressional or public scrutiny and thus robust oversight of surveillance practices. Without notice, the government can avoid judicial determinations, legislative action or public debate that might limit its discretion.[8]

IV. NOTICE BY INTERMEDIARIES TO ACCOUNTHOLDERS IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR GOVERNMENT NOTICE

Although Microsoft is arguing for the ability to notify users of government access to their online files, it is important to underscore that the constitutional obligation of notice belongs to the government, not to Microsoft or any other service provider. The notice requirement has always been about the government announcing its presence and its authority, and the lack of notice affects the validity of a warrant. *See Freitas*, 800 F.2d at 1456 ("the absence of any notice

[8] The notice requirement is also essential to due process. *See Lambert v. California*, 355 U.S. 225, 228 (1957) ("Engrained in our concept of due process is the requirement of notice. Notice is sometimes essential so that the citizen has the chance to defend charges."); *Lavan v. City of Los Angeles*, 693 F.3d 1022, 1032 (9th Cir. 2012) ("the government may not take property like a thief in the night; rather, it must announce its intentions and give the property owner a chance to argue against the taking") (internal quotation marks and citation omitted).

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requirement in the warrant casts strong doubt on its constitutional adequacy”). No private entity can cure a defective warrant.

Constitutional rules cannot depend on the varied and variable behavior of private actors. Microsoft could change its policy of providing notice to its customers. Other service providers may not even have a policy of always providing notice.

Or Microsoft may be placed in situations where it is not sure whether it can lawfully provide notice, or, more likely, where Microsoft simply lacks the knowledge that notice is now required. For instance, the Fourth Amendment requires the government to provide reasonably prompt notice in the absence of specific showings that would justify delay. *Freitas*, 800 F.2d at 1456; *Dalia*, 441 U.S. at 247–48. But a service provider is unlikely to know anything about when notice need no longer be delayed. There is no reason to believe that Microsoft would know, weeks or months after it complied with a warrant, that the relevant investigation had ended or for some other reason no longer need be kept secret. Only the government possesses the relevant facts, and only the government is or can be bound by the Fourth Amendment to provide notice.[9]

V. CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, this Court should deny the government’s motion to dismiss Microsoft’s Fourth Amendment claim.

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[9] Notice to accountholders is also an international norm. *See Necessary & Proportionate: International Principles on the Application of Human Rights to Communications Surveillance* (May 2014), http://necessaryandproportionate.org/principles [http://perma.cc/L4NU-4KMM] (explaining that “[t]hose whose communications are being surveilled should be notified of a decision authorising Communications Surveillance with enough time and information to enable them to challenge the decision or seek other remedies and should have access to the materials presented in support of the application for authorization … The obligation to give notice rests with the State, but communications service providers should be free to notify individuals of the Communications Surveillance, voluntarily or upon request.”).

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Dated this 2nd day of September, 2016.

Respectfully Submitted,

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on September 2, 2016, I electronically filed the foregoing with the Clerk of the Court using the CM/ECF system, which will send notification of such filing to those attorneys of record registered on the CM/ECF system.

DATED this 2nd day of September, 2016.

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