

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 1, 2012

CONTACT
Will Adams
202.225.3849
will.adams@mail.house.gov

AMASH: NO TRACKING CHIPS IN DRIVER'S LICENSES

LETTER URGES DHS SECRETARY TO PROTECT PRIVACY, REVERSE DRIVER'S LICENSE MANDATE

Washington, D.C. – Rep. Justin Amash (R-MI) urged Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Janet Napolitano to reverse a new policy that requires some states to implant radio frequency identification (RFID) chips into the states' driver's licenses. The chips allow Customs and Border Protection officers to scan an entire vehicle from up to 30 feet away in order to identify the vehicle's occupants.

“The chips would give public and private entities an unprecedented ability to track Americans,” wrote Amash. “RFIDs can be read using widely available technology, including technology contained in mobile phones, which increases the risk of identity theft. Furthermore, if RFIDs were to become ubiquitous, there is little doubt that private entities would deploy new technology to capture the chips' data.”

Michigan is one of the states subject to the DHS mandate. The Michigan state House and Senate each unanimously approved a resolution calling on DHS to address privacy concerns related to the mandate, and Michigan Secretary of State Ruth Johnson has asked the Department for the flexibility to issue secure driver's licenses without RFIDs. Amash also is working closely with state Rep. Paul Opsommer on the issue.

The full letter is below:

Dear Secretary Napolitano:

I urge you to reverse the Department of Homeland Security's requirement that enhanced driver's licenses include vicinity radio frequency identification (RFID) technology. I specifically ask the Department to cease demanding that Michigan include RFID chips in its enhanced driver's licenses.

I have been informed that the RFID chips in these driver's licenses would contain unique numbers that Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers could scan from 20 to 30 feet away. These numbers would allow CBP to identify all of the occupants within a vehicle with one scan.

I am deeply concerned about the privacy implications of mandatory RFIDs in driver's licenses. The chips would give public and private entities an unprecedented ability to track Americans. RFIDs can be read using widely available technology, including technology contained in mobile phones, which increases the risk of identity theft.

Furthermore, if RFIDs were to become ubiquitous, there is little doubt that private entities would deploy new technology to capture the chips' data.

Congress never has required RFIDs to be installed in driver's licenses. Current federal law states only that "standards for common machine-readable identity information [are] to be included on each driver's license or personal identification card, including defined minimum data elements." This mandate could be satisfied by issuing driver's licenses with magnetic strips, for example.

The people of Michigan oppose the new requirement. The Michigan state House and Senate each unanimously approved a resolution calling on DHS to address privacy concerns related to the federal mandate. And Michigan's Secretary of State has asked the Department for the flexibility to issue secure driver's licenses without RFIDs.

I believe we can find a solution that both satisfies federal law and protects our civil liberties. Please work with Michigan officials to adopt an alternative to mandatory RFIDs.

Sincerely,

/s/

Justin Amash
Member of Congress

###