Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 27, 2018

Jeffrey Bezos
Chairman, President and CEO
Amazon.com, Inc.
410 Terry Avenue North
Seattle, Washington 98109

Dear Mr. Bezos,

We write to express our deep concerns about your facial recognition technology, sold and branded as "Amazon Rekognition," and the potential impact of this technology on the civil liberties, particularly in communities of color.

We request an immediate meeting with you to discuss how to address the defects of this technology in order to prevent inaccurate outcomes. Before Amazon Rekognition or similar technology is on the market or used by law enforcement, we urge you to work with key stakeholders, communities of color, and policy makers on a regular basis, so that we can create a policy and regulatory environment that is able to adapt with the speed of technology.

As you know, a recent American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) report found that your technology falsely matched 28 Members of Congress as suspected criminals. The ACLU discovered in its test, "nearly 40 percent of Amazon Rekognition's false matches in our test were of people of color, even though they make up only 20 percent of Congress."[1] Given the results of this test, we are alarmed about the deleterious impact this tool – if left unchecked without proper, consistent, and rigorous calibration – will have on communities of color; immigrants; protestors peaceably assembling and others petitioning the Government for a redress of grievances; or any other marginalized group.

Facial recognition and artificial intelligence technology represents how far technology has come and how far it has to go. While we understand that Amazon Rekognition is meant to "detect, analyze, and compare faces for a wide variety of uses,"[2] we are concerned that a match will exacerbate existing biases and strip people of their Constitutionally protected rights. There is an ongoing national debate about the critical need to address disparities in policing, sentencing, and the imbalance in the execution of justice in minority communities. In the hands of law enforcement, this technology would only aggravate this grave situation.

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[1] *Amazon's Face Recognition Falsely Matched 28 Members of Congress With Mugshots*, ACLU (online at https://www.aclu.org/blog/privacy-technology/surveillance-technologies/amazons-face-recognition-falsely-matched-28)
[2] What Is Amazon Rekognition? (online at https://docs.aws.amazon.com/rekognition/latest/dg/what-is.html)

For these reasons, it is critical that developers of technology like Amazon Rekognition include testing and regular consultation with diverse stakeholders -- especially civil rights and civil liberty experts and advocates. Data software excels at finding patterns and aggregating data, but those programs have yet to prove they can accurately analyze the context around the information it collects. Without this context, facial recognition tools can falsely match individuals with those who have committed crimes while also exacerbating existing biases. This can and has led to irretrievable harm to innocent persons' livelihoods; a cost that is too high to ignore.

Thank you for your consideration of our views on this grave matter. Technology should improve the lives and liberties of all people; it should not be a tool to oppress and suppress the rights of any person. We look forward to your prompt response.

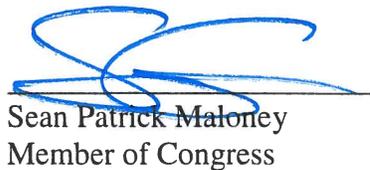Sincerely,
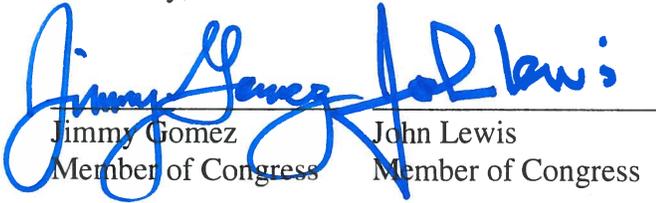
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Member of Congress
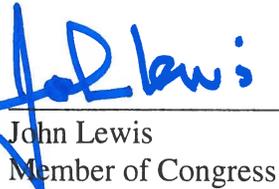
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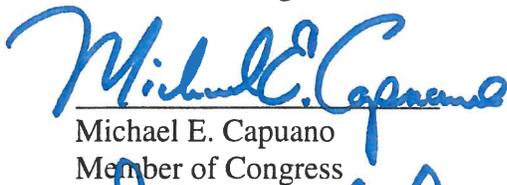
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Member of Congress
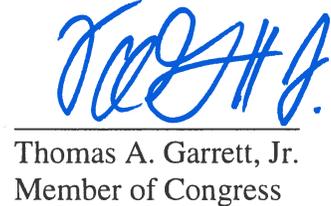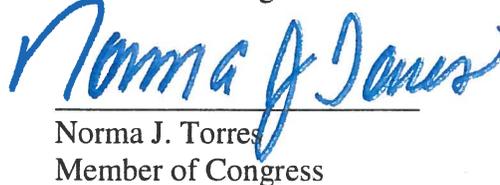
Thomas A. Garrett, Jr.
Member of Congress

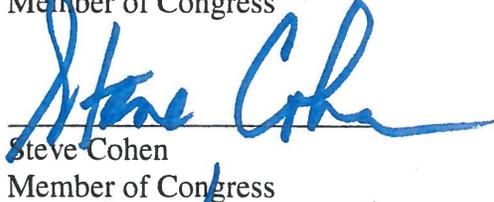Henry C. "Hank" Johnson
Member of Congress

Luis V. Gutiérrez
Member of Congress

Sean Patrick Maloney
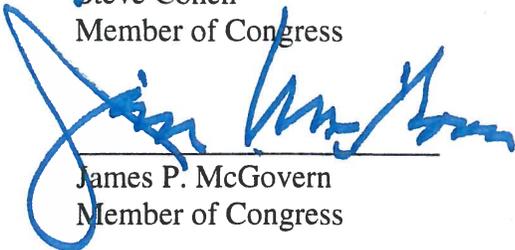Member of Congress

Wm. Lacy Clay
Member of Congress

Michael E. Capuano
Member of Congress

Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

Mark DeSaulnier
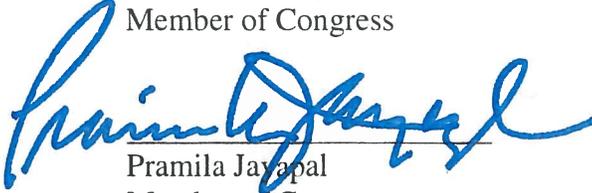Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

Judy Chu
Member of Congress
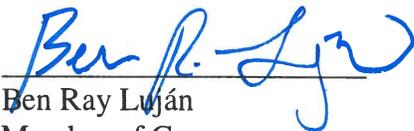
Nanette Diaz Barragán
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Ruben J. Kihuen
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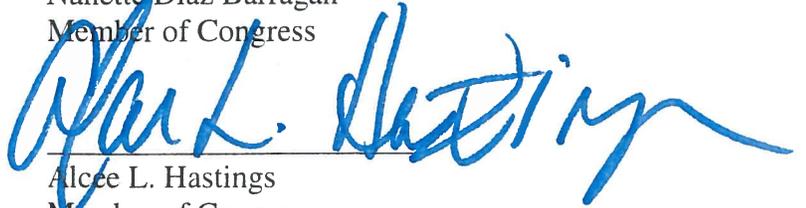
Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

Michelle Lujan Grisham
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke
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Barbara Lee
Member of Congress
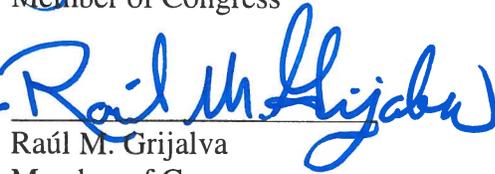
Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

Ben Ray Luján
Member of Congress