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ACLU of Iowa and Others Seek Details on Police Phone Tracking

Des Moines, Iowa — The ACLU of Iowa has sent out requests to the police departments in Iowa's five largest cities, asking each to release information on cell phone location tracking data used to monitor Iowans.

Freedom of Information requests for the data have been sent to police in Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, Sioux City, Iowa City, and Davenport.

The requests are part of a coordinated national information-seeking campaign by 34 ACLU state affiliates across the nation. The effort is one of the largest coordinated information act requests in American history. The requests, being filed under the states' Freedom of Information Act laws, are an effort to strip away the secrecy surrounding law enforcement use of cell phone tracking capabilities.

"We are concerned about why and how law enforcement is using this highly sensitive, personal data," said Randall Wilson, Legal Director for the ACLU of Iowa. "Every Iowan with a cell phone is susceptible to tracking by the government. When people are being tracked, we want to know if there is probable cause and if a warrant has been obtained. Information of this nature is prone to abuse."

Wilson said while cell phone tracking can be a powerful tool in fighting crime, if abused it can be another intrusion by government into personal privacy. "If we want privacy and freedom from domestic surveillance, we've got to ask questions about what's happening," Wilson said.

Law enforcement agencies are being asked for information including:

- Whether law enforcement agents demonstrate probable cause and obtain a warrant to access cell phone location data
- Statistics on how frequently law enforcement agencies obtain cell phone location data
- How much money law enforcement agencies spend tracking cell phones
- Other policies and procedures used for acquiring location data

Law enforcement's use of cell phone location data has become increasingly controversial. Just last week, the general counsel of the National Security Agency suggested to members of Congress that the NSA might have the authority to collect the location information of American citizens inside the U.S. Today's effort by the ACLU is one of the first steps to learn the extent of the problems.

Congress is considering the Geolocation Privacy and Surveillance Act, a bill supported by the ACLU that would require police to get a warrant to obtain personal location information. The bill would protect location data and require customer consent for telecommunications companies to collect location data.

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