U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Blasts data brokers for collecting and selling cell phone location data of people who visit abortion clinics

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and twelve of her Senate colleagues, led by Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), sent letters to SafeGraph and Placer.ai, two data brokers, blasting the companies for collecting and selling the cellphone-based location data of people who visit abortion clinics and risking the safety of anyone seeking access to abortion services. In the wake of the Supreme Court's leaked draft opinion that would overturn Roe v. Wade, the senators are demanding answers about the companies' data collection practices and calling on them to create a complete and permanent ban on these and similar practices.

"Anti-abortion activists have already used location data to send targeted anti-choice ads to women's phones while they are sitting in abortion clinics… Anti-abortion politicians in Republican-led states have placed bounties on women who receive abortions and doctors that provide them and even proposed laws that would punish pregnant people for traveling to seek abortions out of state. Anti-abortion prosecutors have used search and message data to criminally charge abortion seekers," **wrote the senators.** "These and other practices targeting women seeking necessary health care services are almost certain to escalate if Roe v. Wade is gutted and abortion is criminalized instantly in states across the nation. Under these circumstances, [your company's] decision to sell data that allowed any buying customer to determine the locations of people seeking abortion services was simply unconscionable, risking the safety and security of women everywhere."

Senators Patty Murray (D-WA); Tina Smith (D-MN); Bernie Sanders (I-VT); Ed Markey (D-MA); Richard Blumenthal (D-CT.); Cory Booker (D-NJ); Amy Klobuchar (D-MN); Chris Murphy (D-CT.); Ron Wyden (D-OR); Tammy Duckworth (D-IL); and Alex Padilla (D-CA) also joined the letter.

Data brokers across the country use a similar three-step business model. First, companies collect untold amounts of data from Americans when they use websites and mobile applications, oftentimes without the consumer's informed consent or knowledge. Second, data brokers scoop up that information in bulk and repackage that information for sale. Third, purchasers of all stripes buy the data for almost any purpose, reaping massive profits for the $200 billion data-broker industry.

But the senators noted that SafeGraph and Placer.ai's sale of abortion clinic data is especially pernicious, even by the low standards of the largely unregulated data-broker market. The companies collect incredibly precise location and time data from millions of Americans' phones. The data can reveal where people who visit abortion clinics came from, where they go afterwards, and even where they live. And anyone can buy the companies' data — or in Placer.ai's case, access some of the data simply by creating a free account — including individuals, corporations, and governments who want to learn who is seeking abortion care and where they are.

The senators further called out the two companies for their lackluster responses to the public outcry over their data collection practices involving people who visit abortion clinics. Neither company provided any information about the number of people impacted, who accessed their data, whether their data removals would be permanent, or other remedial practices.

Given the grave threats to abortion rights and women's and health care providers' safety if Roe v. Wade is gutted, the senators are calling on the two companies to give detailed answers to their questions about the companies' disturbing practices by May 31, 2022.

Full text of the letters is available [here](#).

An online version of this release is available [here](#).