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Protecting San Franciscans' Sensitive Healthcare Data

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Law enforcement can use reverse warrants to compel tech companies into disclosing the identities of users based on location or search history, exposing sensitive data. This project recommends the San Francisco Mayor's Office of Innovation implement a city controlled data privacy system to protect reproductive and gender-affirming healthcare data gathered during the execution of these warrants. By leveraging the city's existing infrastructure – including the DataSF platform – and maintaining control over the system's privacy protection process, the Office of Innovation could proactively handle privacy concerns in keeping with the San Francisco Reproductive Freedom Act, which passed as a San Francisco ballot measure in the November 2024 elections.

PROBLEM

Tech companies have seen a spike in reverse warrants, with Google receiving over 5,700 reverse warrants from states with anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQI legislation between 2018 and 2020. This upwards trend has coincided with an increase in data breaches for innocent users. For example, the US healthcare sector saw a 141% increase in unauthorized data breaches in 2023, affecting upwards of 133 million individuals. As policymakers on the federal and California state level

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make progress towards prohibiting reverse warrant surveillance, a local data privacy system would offer more comprehensive security for vulnerable persons.

> *This upwards trend in reverse warrants has coincided with an increase in data breaches for innocent users.*

SOLUTION

This project proposes that by developing and implementing a city controlled data privacy system, the Mayor's Office of Innovation could protect sensitive healthcare information during the reverse warrant process. Specifically, the Office could use an API wrapper – a software shield that supervises the flow of information between computer systems–to scrub data of identifying details. The API wrapper's encryption would enable the city to protect both personal privacy and digital rights at a reliable, higher scale.

For more information about this proposal, see: (1) a policy memo *to the San Francisco Mayor's Office of Innovation;* (2) an operational plan *for developing and implementing an API wrapper system;* (3) case studies *that demonstrate successful strategies for protecting sensitive data;* (4) a sample data sharing agreement *between the City and County of San Francisco and a technology company; and* (5) a document *that describes reverse warrants.*

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