

The Honorable Ben Cardin  
Chairman Senate Foreign Relations  
Committee  
423 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jim Risch  
Ranking Member Senate Foreign Relations  
Committee  
423 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

October 4, 2024

Dear Chairman Cardin and Ranking Member Risch,

We, the undersigned organizations, write to strongly urge you to advance the Iran Internet Freedom Act ([S.5076](#)) through a markup at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. This bipartisan piece of legislation represents a crucial effort to uphold internet freedom in Iran.

In Iran, the internet serves as a vital tool for communication and a platform for exposing human rights abuses. Unfortunately, the Islamic Republic of Iran regularly imposes censorship and enforces internet shutdowns, severely limiting the free flow of information. Additionally, the regime has increasingly weaponized the internet as a means of surveillance, particularly targeting activists and civil society groups since the rise of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement. According to the [Freedom House Index](#), Iran is currently one of the worst performers in terms of internet freedom globally.

The Iran Internet Freedom Act seeks to enhance open internet access and combat the repression and surveillance enforced by the Iranian regime. The legislation aims to enhance internet freedom in Iran by updating strategies, providing guidance, circumventing internet blackouts, and supporting programs through grants. Key components of the legislation include:

- **Comprehensive Strategy:** Requires periodic updates to the comprehensive strategy to promote internet freedom and access to information in Iran. The Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of the Treasury and other Federal agencies, must review and update the strategy to address objectives effectively.
- **Guidance for Tech Companies:** Develop guidance for the Department of the Treasury to ensure sanctions enforcement does not prevent companies from providing necessary technology and tools to Iranian civilians.
- **VPN Evaluation:** Evaluate the use of virtual private networks (VPNs) by civil society and human rights activists in Iran. Develop strategies to increase the accessibility of VPNs.
- **Internet Blackouts:** Assess the ability of the Iranian regime to cut off all access to the internet. Develop a strategy to circumvent internet blackouts for Iranian civil society.
- **Grant Program:** Authorizes the Secretary of State to award grants to private organizations to support and develop programs that promote an open, interoperable, reliable, and secure Internet in Iran. The goals of these programs include supporting unrestricted Internet access, increasing the availability of internet freedom tools, and ensuring digital safety information is accessible to human rights defenders and marginalized populations.
- **Authorization of Appropriations:** Appropriates \$15 million for each of the fiscal years 2025 and 2026 to the Open Technology Fund with a focus on diversifying the technical base and conducting comprehensive security audits to prevent misuse by bad actors.

Advancing the Iran Internet Freedom Act is a significant step towards supporting the Iranian people in their quest for a democratic and stable Iran. Open internet access is crucial for

political organizing, the free exchange of information, and connecting Iranians with the broader global community.

Thank you for considering this vital issue. We hope you will stand with the Iranian people in their struggle for human rights and democracy.

Sincerely,



**Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans**



**Center for Human Rights in Iran**



**Freedom House**



**Iranian American Democrats of California**



**Lantern, one of the two largest VPN service providers to Iranian civil society**



**National Union for Democracy in Iran**



**Psiphon, the largest provider of anti-censorship services in Iran**

cc: Senator Chris Murphy  
Senator Todd Young  
Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee