

September 2, 2015

Dear Kilton Library community,

As guardians of knowledge and the freedom to read, librarians have long led the fight for free expression. In the Information Age—which has produced unprecedented access to information and mass surveillance—librarians are eager as ever to help their communities better understand and protect their privacy and intellectual freedom. Across the nation and around the globe, librarians are working with the Library Freedom Project (LFP) to make real the promise of intellectual freedom in the digital age. LFP, along with our partners the ACLU and the Tor Project, provides privacy trainings for library communities, teaching people their rights under the law, and how to find and use free and open source, privacy protective technologies. Thanks to generous funding from the Knight Foundation, LFP has over the past year run dozens of privacy workshops for libraries of all sizes across the United States.

In a pilot project in the summer of 2015, the Kilton Library in Lebanon, New Hampshire, worked with LFP and the Tor Project to setup a Tor relay.¹ Tor is a free, open network that helps people defend against mass surveillance by providing them anonymity online. While the Tor Project is responsible for maintaining the source code for Tor, the technology depends on thousands of volunteers who run "relays", or computer servers that support the Tor network. Libraries are ideal locations to host Tor relays because they are staunch supporters of intellectual freedom and privacy, and because they provide access to other essential internet services. The Kilton Library, with LFP's help, sought to become one among many such nodes in Tor's worldwide internet freedom system.

The Tor network allows users to browse the internet without being tracked by companies or spied on by government agencies. The Tor Project is a nonprofit organization, and its software is free for downloading by anyone. Tor is used by human rights activists, diplomats, journalists, and others who value privacy. Journalists in repressive countries use it to publish their work without fear of government surveillance, censorship or persecution. Domestic violence survivors use it so that they cannot be tracked by their former partners. People in African countries like Zimbabwe and South Africa use it to report poaching of endangered animals without fear of retribution.

Tor is a powerful tool for unfettered intellectual inquiry, one that the United Nation's Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression recently stated should be

¹ <https://blog.torproject.org/blog/tor-exit-nodes-libraries-pilot-phase-one> Tor exit-nodes in libraries - pilot: phase one

“protected and promoted”.² Human Rights Watch recommends Tor for human rights advocates in their report about censorship in China.³ Reporters Without Borders suggests that journalists and bloggers all over the world should use Tor to keep themselves and their sources safe. Whistleblowers, political activists, domestic violence survivors, and others who seek to protect their privacy online use Tor.⁴

The Tor network has also found support in high places in the US government. The anonymizing technology Tor provides is based upon research designs originally developed by the US Navy and others. The Tor Project receives funding from the US State Department to develop, maintain, and promote this democracy-enhancing technology.⁵

When LFP announced the Tor relay pilot at Kilton, the project received popular media attention⁶⁷ and overwhelming community support.⁸⁹¹⁰ Librarians, privacy activists, software developers, attorneys, and ordinary people worldwide expressed excitement about the project's potential. It was immediately clear that LFP and the Kilton Library were onto something important and desperately needed.

Amidst the excitement, we didn't predict that the very US government that birthed and financially underwrites the Tor Project would try to intervene to stop its use in an American library. But just a few weeks into the Kilton pilot, that's exactly what happened.

In mid-August 2015 the Boston office of the US Department of Homeland Security contacted the Portsmouth and Lebanon Police Departments to warn them, falsely, that Tor's primary use is to aid and abet criminal activity. As we understand it, the federal agent from Boston encouraged the police to try to shut the library's relay down. In the face of this federal law enforcement pressure, the Kilton Library shut down the project, in what we hope is a temporary move.

The Department of Homeland Security's preemptive crackdown against the Lebanon community's free speech is wrong. Asking the town to shutter its Tor relay is akin to advising

² <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2089684-un-encryption-report-special-rapporteur-on.html> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye

³ www.hrw.org/reports/2006/china0806/ “Race to the Bottom” Corporate Complicity in Chinese Internet Censorship

⁴ <https://www.torproject.org/about/torusers.html.en#normalusers> Who uses Tor?

⁵ <https://www.torproject.org/about/sponsors.html.en>

⁶ <http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2015/07/crypto-activists-announce-vision-for-tor-exit-relay-in-every-library/> Crypto activists announce vision for Tor exit relay in every library

⁷ <http://motherboard.vice.com/read/public-libraries-will-operate-tor-exit-nodes-to-make-the-service-more-secure/> Public Libraries Will Operate Tor Exit Nodes to Make the Service More Secure

⁸ <https://www.opentechfund.org/article/tor-exit-relays-be-run-libraries-library-freedom-project> Libraries + Tor = win

⁹ <http://www.infodocket.com/2015/07/29/the-library-privacy-project-and-tor-project-begin-library-exit-node-pilot/>

¹⁰ <https://lwn.net/Articles/653335/> Tor and library freedom

that the town close public parks because crimes may be committed there. The underlying fear—that Tor is primarily for criminals—is a gross misrepresentation of Tor and its users, effectively criminalizing the millions of people who use the network for fully legitimate purposes. As recognized by its funders at the State Department, Tor is an essential piece of internet infrastructure, granting people worldwide a measure of freedom from surveillance and censorship. Kilton Library has the right to use Tor, free from federal interference and fear mongering.

Likewise, libraries across the nation should be able to use and support Tor without fear of federal harassment. By standing up for free speech in Lebanon, we will not only protect Kilton Library's sovereignty, but also take a stand for the independence and freedom of all US libraries. In 1953, when anti-Communist fervor threatened freedom of expression, libraries responded with the historic Freedom to Read Statement.¹¹ This document offers a powerful and timeless affirmation of librarians' professional charge:

“[The written word] is possessed of enormous variety and usefulness, worthy of cherishing and keeping free. We realize that the application of these propositions may mean the dissemination of ideas and manners of expression that are repugnant to many persons. We do not state these propositions in the comfortable belief that what people read is unimportant. We believe rather that what people read is deeply important; that ideas can be dangerous; but that the suppression of ideas is fatal to a democratic society. Freedom itself is a dangerous way of life, but it is ours.”

We urge Kilton Library to bring its Tor relay back online, and we've called our greater community to show support for this library and others that may face similar challenges from federal agencies and law enforcement. Together we can demonstrate to the nation and the world that library values are more than just pretty words, but a way of life devoted to freedom.

Signed,
Alison Macrina, director, Library Freedom Project
Nima Fatemi, Library Freedom Project and The Tor Project
ACLU of New Hampshire
ACLU of Massachusetts
Roger Dingledine, The Tor Project
Electronic Frontier Foundation
David Kaye, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression
The Free Software Foundation
Freedom of the Press Foundation

¹¹ <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/statementspols/freedomreadstatement> The Freedom to Read Statement

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Fight for the Future
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Tom Leckrone, The Tor Project
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Nathan Freitas, The Guardian Project; Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard
Matthew Finkel, The Tor Project
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