U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Conducts Maryland Test Facility Site Visit for Facial Recognition Technology Report

WASHINGTON D.C. – Today, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights conducted an important site visit to the Maryland Test Facility (MdTF), as part of the Commission's ongoing investigation into the civil rights implications of Facial Recognition Technology (FRT), which was unanimously taken up by Commissioners. This visit, which took place on Thursday, April 18, 2024, is a significant milestone in the lead-up to the Commission's forthcoming report, due to be published on September 30, 2024.

The site visit was conducted by a bipartisan subcommittee, including the Commission's Chair, Rochelle M. Garza (D), Commissioner Stephen Gilchrist (R), and FRT Report Lead Commissioner, Mondaire Jones, builds on the Commission's briefing held on Friday, March 8, 2024. The briefing focused on how FRT is developed, its utilization by federal agencies, emerging civil rights concerns, and the safeguards being implemented to mitigate potential civil rights issues. The site visit is a significant milestone in evaluating the regulatory framework and civil rights implications of FRT for the Commission's report.

"*The impact of facial recognition technology on marginalized communities, particularly people of color and women, is starkly disproportionate and concerning. While technology offers potential benefits, its unchecked use also presents a serious risk to our civil liberties. Today's site visit offered an invaluable firsthand insight into its use, empowering the Commission's efforts to inform Congress and the President of the necessary safeguards against its misuse,*" said Commission Chair, Rochelle M. Garza.

The delegation's activities today will inform the Commission's ongoing analysis, which specifically reviews the utilization of FRT technology by three federal agencies: the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

"*I'm grateful that the Commission adopted, on a bipartisan basis, my proposal to study the civil rights implications of the federal use of facial recognition technology. Our recent briefing illuminated the urgent need to understand how this technology is tested for real-world accuracy, which is the basis for our visit to the Maryland Test Facility,*" said Lead Report Commissioner, Mondaire Jones.

At the March briefing, Commissioners heard from a diverse group of subject matter experts, including government officials, academics, researchers, software developers, and legal experts. The insights gained from these experts, along with written materials submitted by the public, are instrumental in shaping the Commission's understanding and report recommendations.

According to their website, the MdTF opened in the summer of 2014 to support the DHS Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP)'s Apex Air Entry/Exit Re-engineering (AEER) project. The AEER project created a partnership between S&T and CBP to test and evaluate operational processes using biometric and non-biometric technologies. The MdTF continues to support multiple projects for the DHS S&T Biometrics and Identity Technology Center including those that inform CBP, TSA and external agencies to evaluate and implement solutions in their operational environments.

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