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Contact: Oversight and Government Reform Press Office, (202) 225-5051

Chairman Towns Introduces Legislation to Help Prevent Inadvertent Sharing of Federal Documents on Peer-to-Peer Networks

Washington, DC – U.S. Representative Edolphus “Ed Towns (D-NY), Chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, today introduced the “Secure Federal File Sharing Act. The bill will restrict the use of peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing software across the Federal government. For almost a decade, the House Oversight Committee has examined the dangers associated with P2P software, and earlier this year a Committee hearing exposed the continued security and privacy risks associated with P2P file sharing applications.

During the past year alone, highly sensitive information was discovered on open file sharing networks including the electronic schematics to the President’s helicopter, “Marine One; the financial information belonging to Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer; the location of a U.S. Secret Service safe house for the First Family; and, most recently, the highly confidential House Ethics Committee document containing the list of ongoing investigations.

“We can no longer ignore the threat to sensitive government information that insecure peer-to-peer networks pose, said Chairman Towns. “Voluntary self-regulations have failed so now is the time for Congress to act.

Peer-to-peer technology allows users to share files on their computers directly with other users of a P2P network. The popularity of such software has grown exponentially over the past decade and has great potential if it is used to legally share files that are not copyrighted. Currently, it is estimated that 20 million people are sharing files at any given time resulting in far greater security risks.

“The time has come to put the proper file sharing restrictions in place. I believe my legislation will help prevent these types of inadvertent security breaches from occurring in the future, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to pass this essential legislation, added Chairman Towns.

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