



Immigrants & Social Media
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Last month, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officially implemented a practice of collecting and storing social media data from all immigrants in the U.S. While social media data has been collected from various immigrant and foreign visitor groups in the past, this is the first time DHS will monitor people who are already in the U.S., including green card holders and naturalized citizens, people petitioning for immigration benefits, their petitioners, and their legal representatives.

What information can DHS access?

DHS can obtain data from anything an individual posts publicly on the internet, from public records and institutions, from commercial data providers, and from interviews. According to DHS's official notice on the policy, the department will collect "social media handles, aliases, associated identifiable information, and search results." Social media data will become part of a person's individual immigration file, known as an Alien File or A-file.

What is DHS looking for?

DHS cites a long list of reasons for gathering immigrants' data, including counter-terrorism efforts, law enforcement, and public safety. For the average person seeking an immigration benefit, this may mean looking for signs of drug use, criminal activity, fraud, or ties to terrorist groups.

What advice do we have for our clients?

Keep in mind that the information you put online about yourself, your spouse, your partner, your children, or any friends or family members never goes away. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) can use any derogatory information found about an individual online to deny immigration benefits at any time. Be sure to update your privacy settings to limit the public visibility of your personal information, and avoid posting or sending information or photos on social media that appear to be in favor of drugs, gangs, or illegal activity.

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