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10 *Amici Curiae*

11  
12 **UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**  
13 **FOR THE CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**

14  
15 UNITED STATES,

16 Plaintiff,

17 v.

18  
19 LORI DREW

20 Defendant.

Case No. CR-08-0582-GW

**BRIEF OF *AMICI CURIAE*  
ELECTRONIC FRONTIER  
FOUNDATION, ET AL., IN  
SUPPORT OF DEFENDANT'S  
MOTION TO DISMISS  
INDICTMENT FOR FAILURE TO  
STATE AN OFFENSE AND FOR  
VAGUENESS**

21 Date: September 4, 2008

22 Time: 8:30 AM

Honorable Judge George H. Wu

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**STATEMENT OF INTEREST OF *AMICI CURIAE***

*Amici* are three organizations, the Electronic Frontier Foundation, the Center for Democracy and Technology and Public Citizen, and the 14 individual faculty members listed in Appendix A who research, teach and write scholarly articles and books about internet law, cybercrime, criminal law and related topics at law schools nationwide. None received any compensation for participating in this brief. *Amici*'s sole interest in this case is in the evolution of sound and principled interpretation and application of the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, 18 U.S.C. § 1030(a)(2)(C). *Amici* believe that this brief will assist the Court in its consideration of the proper interpretation and application of the CFAA in this case.

Electronic Frontier Foundation (“EFF”) is a non-profit, member-supported civil liberties organization working to protect free speech and privacy rights. As part of that mission, EFF has served as counsel or *amicus* in key cases addressing privacy issues and rights as applied to the Internet and other new technologies. With more than 13,000 dues-paying members, EFF represents the interests of technology users in both court cases and in broader policy debates surrounding the application of law in the digital age, and publishes a comprehensive archive of digital civil liberties information at one of the most linked-to web sites in the world, [www.eff.org](http://www.eff.org).

Center for Democracy & Technology (“CDT”) is a non-profit public interest and Internet policy organization. CDT represents the public's interest in an open,

1 decentralized Internet reflecting constitutional and democratic values of free  
2 expression, privacy, and individual liberty. In particular, CDT works to protect  
3 online free speech, including the right to speak anonymously and to engage in robust  
4 communication and debate without inappropriate threats of criminal sanctions.  
5

6 Public Citizen is a non-profit, public interest organization that has defended the  
7 rights of citizens and consumers since its founding in 1971. Public Citizen has stood  
8 against the enforceability of abusive terms in one-sided contracts of adhesion and  
9 strongly rejects the proposition that criminal liability should attach to violations of  
10 contractual fine print. Since 1999, Public Citizen has also defended the First  
11 Amendment right of citizens to communicate anonymously in online forums without  
12 the threat of unjustified liability.  
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**FACTS AND SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENT**

Defendant Lori Drew is a Missouri resident charged in the Central District of California with violating the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (“CFAA”). The Government alleges that in the fall of 2006, Defendant created a MySpace account under the name of “Josh Evans.” Indictment, *United States v. Drew*, No. 08-00582, 6 (C.D. Cal. May 15, 2008). Through the “Josh Evans” account, Defendant communicated and developed an online relationship with Megan Meier, a 13-year-old girl also living in Missouri. Indictment at 6. At some point during their communications “Josh Evans” said hurtful things to Miss Meier. *Id.* at 7-8. Tragically, Miss Meier took her own life.

There are state and federal statutes that regulate harassing and otherwise harmful speech, carefully identifying speech that falls outside of First Amendment protection. *See, e.g.*, 47 U.S.C. § 223(a)(1)(C); R.S.Mo. 565.090 (former).<sup>1</sup> Neither of those statutes appears to criminalize the communications from “Josh Evans” to Miss Meier here. In the absence of applicable First Amendment-compliant criminal statutes, the Government has chosen to indict Defendant for violating the CFAA, 18 U.S.C. § 1030(a)(2)(C), and for conspiring to violate it. The Government theory is that Defendant's use of a fictitious name and registration information and her hurtful speech violated the MySpace terms of service (TOS). *See Terms and Conditions – MySpace.com*, <http://www.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=misc.terms> (last modified Feb. 28, 2008). Defendant allegedly failed to provide truthful and accurate registration information; failed to refrain from using any information obtained from MySpace services to harass, abuse, or harm other people; failed to refrain from soliciting personal information from anyone under 18; failed to refrain from

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<sup>1</sup> The Missouri legislature amended the statute following this case in recognition that the laws in effect at the time would not prohibit the conduct alleged here. The new statute, which requires proof of intent to do harm to another (as the First Amendment requires), may or may not criminalize Defendant’s alleged conduct.

1 promoting information that she knew was false or misleading; and failed to refrain  
2 from posting photographs of other people without their consent, all in violation of  
3 the terms of use. Indictment at 6-7. On the Government’s view, account holders  
4 who use their MySpace accounts in violation of the TOS are accessing the company  
5 servers “without authorization” or “in excess of authorization.” In this way,  
6 Defendant victimized MySpace when “Josh Evans” did not follow its terms of  
7 service.

8 The Government’s novel and unprecedented response to what everyone  
9 recognizes as a tragic situation would create a reading of the CFAA that has  
10 dangerous ramifications far beyond the facts here. Terms of service include  
11 prohibitions both trivial and profound. As detailed in examples below, the  
12 Government's theory would attach criminal penalties to minors under the age of 18  
13 who use the Google search engine, as well as to many individuals who legitimately  
14 exercise their First Amendment rights to speak anonymously online. This effort to  
15 stretch the computer crime law in order to punish Defendant Drew for Miss Meier's  
16 death would convert the millions of internet-using Americans who disregard the  
17 terms of service associated with online services into federal criminals. Indeed, survey  
18 evidence shows that the majority of teenage MySpace users have entered at least  
19 some false information into MySpace, and would thus be subject to prosecution  
20 under the Government’s theory. Pew Internet & American Life Project, *Teens,*  
21 *Privacy and Online Social Networks: How teens manage their online identities and*  
22 *personal information in the age of MySpace*, 23-24,  
23 [http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP\\_Teens\\_Privacy\\_SNS\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Teens_Privacy_SNS_Report_Final.pdf) (Apr.  
24 18, 2007). In fact, child safety advocates like the Child Exploitation and Online  
25 Protection Centre of the British government specifically encourage children to  
26 protect themselves by providing misleading identifying information instead of real  
27 names on social networking sites. See Child Exploitation and Online Protection  
28 Centre, *Thinkuknow: Social Networking*,

1 [http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/\(X\(1\)S\(z4uckb3yrpokhbemgzsglhm2\)\)/8\\_10/control/s](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/(X(1)S(z4uckb3yrpokhbemgzsglhm2))/8_10/control/s)  
2 ocial.aspx (last visited July 31, 2008) (“It’s a good idea to use a nickname rather than  
3 your real name.”). To the best of amici’s knowledge, never before in the 22-year  
4 history of the CFAA has a criminal prosecution been based on such a theory.

5 The case is reminiscent of *United States v. LaMacchia*, 871 F.Supp. 535 (D.  
6 Mass. 1994), where the district court rejected a Government attempt to stretch the  
7 scope of the federal wire fraud statute, 18 U.S.C. § 1343, to cover the unauthorized,  
8 non-commercial distribution of copyrighted software products over the internet by an  
9 MIT student. At the time, copyright law did not contain criminal provisions against  
10 non-commercial infringement. Noting that the key question was whether,  
11 metaphorically, “new wine can be poured into an old bottle,” *id.* at 536, the court  
12 recognized that:

13 [w]hat the Government is seeking to do is to punish conduct that  
14 reasonable people might agree deserves the sanctions of the criminal  
15 law. . . . While the Government's objective is a laudable one,  
16 particularly when the facts alleged in this case are considered, its  
17 interpretation of the wire fraud statute would serve to criminalize the  
18 conduct of not only persons like LaMacchia, but also the myriad of  
19 home computer users who succumb to the temptation to copy even a  
20 single software program for private use.

21 *Id.* at 544.<sup>2</sup>

22 The case is also reminiscent of *United States v. McDanel*, prosecuted by this  
23 same United States Attorney’s office under a different provision of the CFAA before

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24 <sup>2</sup> *Accord United States v. Czubinski*, 106 F.3d 1069, 1079 (1st Cir. 1997) (reversing  
25 CFAA and fraud convictions for browsing through IRS files but not sending or  
26 obtaining any information, the court added "a cautionary note. The broad language  
27 of the mail and wire fraud statutes are both their blessing and their curse. They can  
28 address new forms of serious crime that fail to fall within more specific legislation.  
. . . . On the other hand, they might be used to prosecute kinds of behavior that,  
albeit offensive to the morals or aesthetics of federal prosecutors, cannot reasonably  
be expected by the instigators to form the basis of a federal felony. The case at bar  
falls within the latter category.")

1 the Government admitted error on appeal and moved to overturn the defendant's  
2 conviction. *See United States v. McDanel*, Government Brief, attached as Exhibit A,  
3 at 6, 8. In *McDanel*, the Government stretched the definition of "harm to the  
4 integrity" of a computer system to cover truthful reports about a security  
5 vulnerability that could endanger a customer's private communications.

6 The Government's proposed interpretation of the CFAA in this case is a  
7 similar stretch, one that is unsupported by case law or Congressional intent, is  
8 overbroad and unconstitutionally vague, and would punish constitutionally protected  
9 activities. This Court should reject the unwarranted expansion of the CFAA and  
10 dismiss the indictment.

11 **I. THIS COURT SHOULD DISMISS THE COMPUTER FRAUD AND**  
12 **ABUSE ACT CHARGES AGAINST DEFENDANT DREW BECAUSE**  
13 **HER ALLEGED VIOLATION OF THE MYSPACE TERMS OF USE**  
14 **DOES NOT CONSTITUTE "UNAUTHORIZED ACCESS" OR**  
15 **"EXCEEDING AUTHORIZED ACCESS" UNDER THE STATUTE**

16 A MySpace account holder does not gain unauthorized access or exceed  
17 authorized access to MySpace servers by disregarding conditions set forth in that  
18 service's terms of service (TOS). The CFAA criminalizes unauthorized access to a  
19 computer system or to information on the system. Both the plain language of the  
20 statute and the legislative history show that the statute is meant to punish trespassers  
21 and "hackers," not users who ignore or violate sites' contracts or customers who  
22 misuse the service.

23 **A. By Its Plain Terms, The Computer Fraud And Abuse Act Prohibits**  
24 **Trespass And Theft, Not Mere Contractual Violations Of Terms Of**  
25 **Use**

26 The fundamental question in this case is when access to a highly popular,  
27 everyday web site is "without authorization" or in excess of authorized access.<sup>3</sup> The

28 <sup>3</sup> Another issue is whether the Government must plead and prove that Defendant  
intended that her access be unauthorized, or merely that she intended to access, and  
the access also happened to be unauthorized. Criminalizing unintentional computer

1 plain language of the CFAA does not criminalize an account holder's use of a  
2 computer in violation of TOS, but rather a trespasser's access to computer systems or  
3 areas of computer networks without permission. In other words, the statute prohibits  
4 trespass and theft, not improper motive or use. Every exercise of statutory  
5 interpretation begins with an examination of the plain language of the statute.  
6 *Christensen v. C.I.R.*, 523 F.3d 957, 962 (9th Cir. 2008) (Courts look to the plain  
7 language of a statute, and to legislative history). The Government charged  
8 Defendant with 18 U.S.C. 1030 (a)(2)(C), which states:

9 (a) Whoever-- ... (2) intentionally accesses a computer without  
10 authorization or exceeds authorized access, and thereby obtains--... (C)  
11 information from any protected computer if the conduct involved an  
interstate or foreign communication; ... shall be punished as provided in  
subsection (c) of this section.

12 Although Congress did not define the phrase “without authorization,” it did so for  
13 the phrase “exceeds authorized access”. The term “exceeds authorized access”  
14 means: “to access a computer with authorization and to use such access to obtain or  
15 alter information in the computer that the accessor is not entitled so to obtain or  
16 alter.” 18 U.S.C. § 1030(e)(6) (2008).

17 The plain language of the statute prohibits trespass, either by outsiders who  
18 have no rights to the computer system, or by “insiders” who have some rights to  
19 access the computer system, but have limited rights to access or alter information on  
20 that same system. The Indictment in this case does not allege whether the  
21 defendant’s access to the MySpace service was “without authorization” or “in excess  
22 of authorized access” or both. Regardless, both prongs of 1030(a)(2)(C) are  
23 straightforward prohibitions against computer trespass. The first covers outsiders  
24 who have no rights to the computer system, and the second covers “insiders” who  
25 have some rights to access the computer system, but do not have rights to access or  
26 alter certain files or information on that same system. If the computer owner gives

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27 trespass raises serious due process problems, but *amici* do not take up that issue  
28 here.

1 the user the ability to access to particular information, then the user does not exceed  
2 his authorization by accessing that information, regardless of the purpose or manner  
3 of such access. *Lockheed Martin Corp. v. Speed*, 2006 WL 2683058, \*5 (M.D. Fla.  
4 Aug. 1, 2006) (plain reading of “exceeds authorized access” means “those [who go]  
5 *above* [their] authorization, meaning those that go beyond the permitted access  
6 granted to them – typically insiders exceeding whatever access is permitted to  
7 them”). The plain language of Section 1030(a)(2) targets “the unauthorized  
8 procurement or alteration of information, not its misuse or misappropriation.”  
9 *Shamrock Foods v. Gast*, 535 F. Supp. 2d 962, 965 (D. Ariz. 2008) (citing *Brett*  
10 *Senior & Assocs., P.C. v. Fitzgerald*, 2007 WL 2043377 (E.D. Pa. July 13, 2007)).

11 **B. The Legislative History Supports The View That The CFAA**  
12 **Prohibits Trespass And Theft, Not Improper Motive Or Use.**

13 The legislative history confirms that Congress intended the CFAA to  
14 criminalize intruders who trespassed on computers and computer networks. *Int’l*  
15 *Ass’n of Machinists and Aerospace Workers v. Werner-Masuda*, 390 F. Supp. 2d  
16 479, 495-96 (D.Md 2005) (citing S. Rep. No. 99-432, at 4 (1986), *reprinted in* 1986  
17 U.S.C.C.A.N. 2479, 2482 (explaining that the CFAA “is a consensus bill aimed at  
18 deterring and punishing certain ‘high-tech’ crimes’’)). The CFAA was originally  
19 called the Counterfeit Access Device and Computer Fraud and Abuse Act and was  
20 enacted in 1984. Counterfeit Access Device and Computer Fraud and Abuse Act,  
21 Pub. L. No. 98-473, Title II, § 2102(a), 98 Stat. 1937 (1984) (prior to 1986  
22 amendment). The 1984 House Committee emphasized that “section 1030 deals with  
23 an ‘unauthorized access’ concept of computer fraud rather than the mere use of a  
24 computer. Thus, the conduct prohibited is analogous to that of ‘breaking and  
25 entering’ rather than using a computer . . . in committing the offense.” H.R. Rep.  
26 No. 98-894 at 20 (1984) *reprinted in* 1984 U.S.C.C.A.N. 3689, 3706. Consequently,  
27 the committee report emphasized concerns about “hackers” who “trespass into”  
28 computers and the inability of “password codes” to protect against this threat. *Id. at*



1 10-11, *reprinted in* 1984 U.S.C.C.A.N. 3689, 3695-97. The 1984 version of the law  
2 criminalized actions of one who gains “unauthorized access” or who “having  
3 accessed a computer with authorization, uses the opportunity such access provides  
4 for purposes to which such authorization does not extend.”

5 In 1986, Congress deleted the part of the statute that prohibited those with  
6 authorization from using the system for unauthorized purposes and substituted the  
7 phrase “exceeds authorized access.” *Werner-Masuda*, 390 F. Supp. 2d 479, 499 n.12  
8 (D. Md. 2005) (quoting S. Rep. No. 99-432, at 9 (1986), *reprinted in* 1986  
9 U.S.C.C.A.N. 2479, 2486). As the court in *Werner-Masuda* explains:

10 By enacting this amendment, and providing an express definition for  
11 “exceeds authorized access,” the intent was to “eliminate coverage for  
12 authorized access that aims at ‘purposes to which such authorization  
13 does not extend,’” thereby “removing from the sweep of the statute one  
14 of the murkier grounds of liability, under which a [person's] access to  
15 computerized data might be legitimate in some circumstances, but  
16 criminal in other (not clearly distinguishable) circumstances that might  
17 be held to exceed his authorization.

18 *Id.* at 499 n.12 (quoting S. Rep. No. 99-432, at 21, 1986 U.S.C.C.A.N. 2479, 2494-  
19 95) (alterations in original). Congress used the “exceeds authorized access” language  
20 to avoid extending criminal liability to employees where administrative sanctions  
21 were more appropriate. *Id.*

22 This intention is further supported by the fact that, when discussing the CFAA,  
23 and specifically section (a)(2)(C), legislators often referred to “hackers” and the need  
24 to protect sensitive information from theft. *See, e.g.*, 142 Cong. Rec. E1621-03  
25 (daily ed. Sept. 17, 1996) (statement of Rep. Goodlatte); *see also* 141 Cong. Rec.  
26 S9423 (daily ed. June 29, 1995) (statement of Sen. Leahy). The modern,  
27 conventional usage of “hacker” is usually someone who gains unauthorized access to  
28 a computer typically to obtain information of value he or she is not entitled to obtain,  
or to cause damage. *See, e.g.*, *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford Univ. Press  
(defining, *inter alia*, a hacker as “a person who uses his skill with computers to try to  
gain unauthorized access to computer files or networks”); *see also United States v.*

1 *Riggs*, 739 F. Supp. 414, 423-24 (N.D. Ill. 1990) (citing approvingly to sources that  
2 define hackers as those using computer skills to gain unauthorized access to a  
3 computer system). The legislative history makes no mention of unauthorized or  
4 excessive access obtained through ignorance or disregard of private terms of service.

5 The legislative history supports the conclusion that the CFAA criminalizes  
6 trespasses in which the user gains access to computer services or information to  
7 which he is not entitled, not those in which an authorized individual uses the services  
8 or information in an impermissible manner. Defendant Drew had an account on  
9 MySpace, a free interactive internet-based social network open to anyone who signs  
10 up for the service. There are no fees, no vetting, no checks on who may use the  
11 service. Usernames and passwords are deployed, not to keep people off MySpace,  
12 but to give users control over their own account profiles and keep such profiles  
13 separate. Defendant Drew allegedly used her account to access MySpace services  
14 and information. She had no special skill with computers and did not circumvent any  
15 security measures, technological or otherwise. As is any member of the public who  
16 signs up and holds an account, she was authorized to use the service and to access  
17 the system, including information stored there. The way she used her account, if the  
18 allegations are true, was reprehensible. But unless her hateful speech rises to the  
19 level of harassment or stalking, it is not criminal and cannot be punished; attempting  
20 instead to punish that speech under the CFAA merely because it took place on the  
21 internet in contravention to a private terms of service is improper.

22 **C. Courts Are Justifiably Wary Even Of Civil Enforcement Of**  
23 **Website Terms Of Service**

24 Adopting the erroneous view of the CFAA propounded by the prosecution in  
25 this case would criminalize the actions of internet users or web service account  
26 holders who violate a mere contractual promise to use a computer in a certain way or  
27 who ignore or disregard terms of service hidden behind a “legal notices” hyperlink at  
28 the bottom of a webpage. As detailed in Section III.A, *infra*, many, perhaps most,

1 internet users do not even read or understand these documents, which are often long,  
2 riddled with legalese, and poorly organized and formatted or typically are written at  
3 a level of difficulty that exceeds the ability of most consumers to understand.  
4 *Accord* Robert W. Gomulkiewicz, *Getting Serious About User-Friendly Mass*  
5 *Market Licensing for Software*, 12 Geo. Mason L. Rev. 687, 692-94, 701-02 (2004);  
6 Alan M. White & Cathy Lesser Mansfield, *Literacy and Contract*, 13 Stan. L. &  
7 Pol’y Rev. 233, 235-42 (2002). Significantly, the Government in this case has not  
8 alleged that the Defendant or co-conspirators ever read or even looked at the  
9 MySpace terms, but only that the terms “were readily *available*” to users “who *could*  
10 click on a link titled ‘Terms of Service’ or ‘Terms’ to be directed to a web page  
11 where [they] *could* review those rules.” Indictment at 4 (emphasis added).<sup>4</sup>

12 Indeed, the current prosecution would impose criminal liability for merely  
13 ignoring or violating terms of service at a time that courts and academics continue to  
14 debate the extent to which and under what circumstances such documents should be  
15 enforced as a matter of regular civil contract law. *See, e.g.*, Mark A. Lemley, *Terms*  
16 *of Use*, 91 Minn. L. Rev. 459, 462-63, 475-76 (2006) (citing cases and noting  
17 differences in enforceability between corporate-entity defendants and individuals).  
18 Among the thorny issues that are presented by such cases are whether the user  
19 receives adequate actual or constructive notice of the terms, whether the user  
20 effectively consents and whether the terms are unconscionable. Whatever the merits  
21 of recognizing private, civil contract obligations and remedies in such situations,  
22 however, the imposition of serious criminal liability in light of these problems would  
23 be fundamentally unfair.

24 \_\_\_\_\_  
25 <sup>4</sup> This failure to allege that Defendant had any actual notice or awareness of the  
26 terms of service, her violation of which allegedly constitutes the sole basis for  
27 “unauthorized” use and criminal CFAA liability, would appear to undermine the  
28 sufficiency of the indictment, given Section 1030 (a)(2)(C)’s requirement that one  
“intentionally” access a computer without authorization or exceed authorized  
access, However, *amici* do not focus further on this issue.

1           **D. Imposing Criminal Liability For Ignoring Or Violating Terms Of**  
2           **Service Would Be An Unprecedented, Extraordinary And**  
3           **Dangerous Extension Of Federal Criminal Law**

4           George Washington University Law Professor Orin Kerr has argued  
5 thoughtfully and persuasively that “unauthorized access” should not include access  
6 to a computer in violation of a contract or terms of service. Doing so would:

7           threaten a dramatic and potentially unconstitutional expansion of  
8 criminal liability in cyberspace. Because Internet users routinely ignore  
9 the legalese that they encounter in contracts governing the use of  
10 websites, Internet Service Providers (ISPs), and other computers, broad  
11 judicial interpretations of unauthorized access statutes could potentially  
12 make millions of Americans criminally liable for the way they send e-  
13 mails and surf the Web.

14           Orin S. Kerr, *Cybercrime's Scope: Interpreting "Access" and "Authorization" in*  
15 *Computer Misuse Statutes*, 78 N.Y.U. L. Rev. 1596, 1599 (2003). Consider the  
16 remarkable and disturbing results that a contract-based approach to authorized access  
17 can create under the CFAA:

18           Imagine that a website owner announces that only right-handed people  
19 can view his website, or perhaps only friendly people. Under the  
20 contract-based approach, a visit to the site by a left-handed or surly  
21 person is an unauthorized access that may trigger state and federal  
22 criminal laws. A computer owner could set up a public web page,  
23 announce that “no one is allowed to visit my web page,” and then refer  
24 for prosecution anyone who clicks on the site out of curiosity. By  
25 granting the computer owner essentially unlimited authority to define  
26 authorization, the contract standard delegates the scope of criminality to  
27 every computer owner.

28           *Id.* at 1650-51.

          Professor Kerr's concerns are not merely hypothetical. There are many  
surprising terms of service provisions that, if violated, would convert authorized  
users into federal criminals. Take for example, two of the internet's most popular  
websites' terms of service:

- “You may not use the Services and may not accept the Terms if (a) you are not of legal age to form a binding contract with Google,” *Google Terms of Service*, § 2.3, <http://www.google.com/accounts/TOS> (last modified Apr. 16, 2007).

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- “[Y]ou agree to . . . provide accurate, current and complete information about you as may be prompted by any registration forms on the Site ("Registration Data") . . . [and] maintain and promptly update the Registration Data, and any other information you provide to Company, to keep it accurate, current and complete . . . .” *Facebook Terms of Use*, <http://www.facebook.com/terms.php> (last modified June 7, 2008).

6 On the Government's view, a user who is under the age of majority violates  
7 the CFAA every time she enters a search query on the Google.com webpage and  
8 obtains information. Under Facebook’s terms of use, if a user changes jobs or  
9 addresses or even her thoughts on what her favorite movie is, she would need to  
10 immediately tell Facebook, as this is information she has provided to the company,  
11 or run the risk that her continued use of the site could lead to criminal sanctions.<sup>5</sup>

12 In another example, the Electronic Frontier Foundation reports that terms of  
13 service for the popular dating site Match.com require users of either the website or  
14 the dating service to be single or separated from their spouses. *See, e.g., Match.com*  
15 *Terms of Use Agreement*, <http://www.match.com/registration/membagr.aspx> (“You  
16 must be at least eighteen (18) years of age and single or separated from your spouse  
17 to register as a member of Match.com or use the Website.”) (last visited July 30,  
18 2008). The brief's author has not been able to visit the site to confirm the report;  
19 because she remains happily married, doing so would be a violation of the site’s  
20 terms, potentially a criminal act under the interpretation of the CFAA advanced by  
21 the Government here.

22 \_\_\_\_\_

23 <sup>5</sup> It is of no import that the Government might not bring these cases. The inability to  
24 distinguish in a meaningful and principled way between the terms of service  
25 violations of the Defendant here and the myriad other similar violations of terms like  
26 those of MySpace or Facebook that occur every day starkly reveals the  
27 unconstitutional vagueness and potential for arbitrary enforcement the statute would  
28 suffer under the Government’s interpretation. *See* Section III, *infra*. Moreover,  
because the CFAA provides for a civil cause of action, the Government's  
interpretation would enable Google and Facebook and any other affected web site  
owner to bring suit.

1           **E. The Better View, Supported By More Recent Cases, Rejects CFAA**  
2           **Liability For Authorized Users Acting Outside the Terms and**  
3           **Conditions of That Authorization**

4           Professor Kerr's concern about applying the CFAA to contract violations  
5 followed holdings by several courts in civil cases that a disloyal employee's use of a  
6 computer or a competitor's automated searching of a system for commercial  
7 purposes could violate the statute. However, the more recent and better view,  
8 consistent with Kerr's well-reasoned analysis, rejects the idea that authorized access  
9 becomes unauthorized, and thus criminal, when the user acts with his own purposes,  
10 rather than those of the computer owner, in mind. *See, e.g., Werner-Masuda*, 390 F.  
11 *Supp. 2d* at 495-96; *Brett Senior & Assocs.*, 2007 WL 2043377; *Diamond Power*  
12 *Int'l, Inc. v. Davidson*, 540 F. *Supp. 2d* 1322 (N.D. Ga. 2007); *Lockheed Martin*  
13 *Corp.*, 2006 WL 2683058. This better view rejects CFAA liability even where the  
14 defendant is a former employee violating a negotiated employment contract or  
15 confidentiality agreement by transferring confidential information to a rival company  
16 for the employee's own economic benefit and to the detriment of the computer  
17 owner. The instant case is a far easier one: all that is alleged here is that the  
18 defendant violated the standard MySpace service terms of use, and did so without  
19 any purpose to gather trade secrets or commercial or proprietary data, or to gain any  
20 economic advantage.

21           1.       **More Recent, Better-Reasoned Cases Adopt A Narrower View Of**  
22           **"Exceeding Authorized Access"**

23           The better-reasoned cases hold that if a user is authorized to access a computer  
24 and information stored there, then doing so is not criminal, even if that access is in  
25 violation of a contractual agreement or non-negotiated terms of use. For example, in  
26 *Werner-Masuda* the plaintiff argued that the defendant, a union officer, exceeded her  
27 authorization to use the union computer when she accessed a membership list to send  
28 to a rival union, and not for legitimate union business. The defendant had signed an  
agreement promising that she would not access union computers "contrary to the

1 policies and procedures of the [union] Constitution”. *Werner-Masuda*, 390 F. Supp.  
2 2d at 495 (D. Md. 2005). The District Court rejected this argument, holding that even  
3 if the defendant breached a contract, that breach of a promise not to use information  
4 stored on union computers in a particular way did not mean her access to that  
5 information was unauthorized or criminal.

6 Thus, to the extent that *Werner-Masuda* may have breached the  
7 Registration Agreement by using the information obtained for purposes  
8 contrary to the policies established by the [union] Constitution, it does  
9 not follow, as a matter of law, that she was not authorized to access the  
10 information, or that she did so in excess of her authorization in violation  
11 of the [Stored Communications Act] or the CFAA. . . . Although  
12 Plaintiff may characterize it as so, the gravamen of its complaint is not  
13 so much that *Werner-Masuda* improperly accessed the information  
14 contained in VLodge, but rather what she did with the information once  
15 she obtained it. . . . Nor do [the] terms [of the Stored Communications  
16 Act and the CFAA] proscribe authorized access for unauthorized or  
17 illegitimate purposes. (citations omitted)

18 *Id.* at 499.

19 Here, too, the gravamen of the Government's complaint is not that Defendant  
20 improperly obtained information to which she was not entitled on the MySpace  
21 servers, but rather that she used the MySpace service for an unauthorized or  
22 illegitimate purpose. The CFAA does not proscribe authorized access for  
23 unauthorized or illegitimate purposes. Thus, to the extent that Defendant may have  
24 breached the Terms of Service by using a MySpace account contrary to the policies  
25 established by the company, it does not follow that she was not authorized to access  
26 the MySpace servers in violation of the CFAA.

27 Subsequent cases have followed the reasoning of *Werner-Masuda* based on  
28 either plain language or legislative history. In *Lockheed Martin Corp.* the court  
found no CFAA violation under the plain language of the statute. “Exceeds  
authorized access,” the opinion states, refers to those employees “that go beyond the  
permitted access granted to them – typically insiders exceeding whatever access is  
permitted to them.” *Lockheed Martin Corp.*, 2006 WL 2683058, at \*5.

In *Diamond Power Int’l, Inc. v. Davidson*, the District Court similarly rejected

1 a CFAA claim against an employee who violated an employment agreement by  
2 using his access to his employer computer system to steal data for a competitor. The  
3 defendant transferred information from password-protected computer drives to his  
4 new employer while still employed with the former company in violation of a  
5 confidentiality agreement. *Davidson*, 540 F. Supp. 2d at 1327-31. Correctly  
6 identifying the narrower interpretation of “exceeding authorized access” as “the  
7 more reasoned view,” the court held that “a violation for accessing ‘without  
8 authorization’ occurs only where initial access is not permitted. And a violation for  
9 ‘exceeding authorized access’ occurs where initial access is permitted but the access  
10 of certain information is not permitted.” *Id.* at 1343.

11 In *Brett Senior & Assocs.*, an employer alleged that its former employee  
12 misused confidential information at his new employer in violation of the CFAA.  
13 While still working with his former employer, the employee interviewed with a rival  
14 company and showed it a list of his employer's clients and those the details of those  
15 clients’ business with the company. Before leaving to join the new firm, the  
16 employee then contacted 20 of his clients and convinced 15 of them to come with  
17 him to the new firm. *Brett Senior & Assocs., P.C.*, 2007 WL 2043377 at \*1. The  
18 court relied on the legislative history to reject the former employer's CFAA claim.  
19 The employee defendant had full access to information contained in the computer  
20 system until his departure, and the court concluded that a CFAA violation is a  
21 trespass offense, not a misuse of services offense. *Id.* at \*3.

22 In *Shamrock Foods v. Gast*, under similar facts, the District Court relied on  
23 *Davidson* and *Werner-Masuda* to hold that the defendant did not access the  
24 information at issue “without authorization” or in a manner that “exceed[ed]  
25 authorized access.” *Shamrock Foods*, 535 F. Supp. 2d at 968. The defendant had an  
26 employee account on the computer he used at his employer Shamrock and was  
27 permitted to view the specific files he allegedly emailed to himself. The CFAA did  
28 not apply, even though the emailing was for the improper purpose of benefiting



1 himself and a rival company in violation of the defendant's Confidentiality  
2 Agreement.<sup>6</sup> See *Werner-Masuda*, 390 F.Supp.2d at 496 (interpreting the same  
3 language “prohibit[ing] only unauthorized access and not the misappropriation or  
4 disclosure of information” in the Stored Communications Act (SCA), 18 U.S.C. §  
5 2701(a) to mean that “there is no violation of section 2701 for a person with  
6 authorized access to the database no matter how malicious or larcenous his intended  
7 use of that access.” (quoting *Educ’al Testing Service v. Stanley H. Kaplan, Educ’al*  
8 *Ctr., Ltd.*, 965 F. Supp. 731, 740 (D. Md. 1997) (“[I]t appears evident that the sort of  
9 trespasses to which the [SCA] applies are those in which the trespasser gains access  
10 to information to which he is not entitled to see, not those in which the trespasser  
11 uses the information in an unauthorized way.”))).

12 2. Older Cases Wrongly Adopted A Broader View Of “Exceeding  
13 Authorized Access”

14 The cases discussed above contrast with and reject earlier decisions, most  
15 importantly *Shurgard Storage Ctrs., Inc. v. Safeguard Self Storage, Inc.*, 119 F.  
16 Supp. 2d 1121 (W.D. Wash. 2000), which introduced an agency theory of  
17 authorization under the CFAA that several courts have followed. *Shurgard* follows  
18 neither the plain language nor the legislative intent of the CFAA and would lead to a  
19 variety of troubling and potentially unconstitutional results. See *id.* The reasoning in  
20 *Werner-Masuda* is both persuasive and correct and, to the extent that *Shurgard* takes  
21 a different approach, this Court should reject it.

22 In *Shurgard*, the District Court denied a motion to dismiss a CFAA claim  
23 brought by an employee that took employer information from the computer system

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24 <sup>6</sup> Of course, a plaintiff may be able to bring a valid claim under state law for  
25 misappropriation of trade secrets. That claim would be subject to the safeguards  
26 built into the trade secret liability rules, including allowances for reverse engineering  
27 and for disclosure of information that is not, in fact, secret. The CFAA violation has  
28 no safeguards; under the Government’s view in this case it would put all the power  
in the hands of the corporation drafting the terms of use.

1 with him to his next job. *Id.* at 1129. The court relied on the Restatement (Second)  
2 of Agency, §112 (1958), to hold that when the plaintiff's former employees accepted  
3 new jobs with the defendant, the employees “lost their authorization and were  
4 ‘without authorization’ [under the CFAA] when they allegedly obtained and sent [the  
5 plaintiff's] proprietary information to the defendant via e-mail”). *Shurgard*, 119 F.  
6 Supp. 2d at 1125. The court examined the Senate report accompanying Congress’s  
7 1996 amendments to the CFAA, and concluded that Congress intended the statute to  
8 have “broad meaning” that was intended to cover the situation under dispute. *Id.* at  
9 1129. But the 1996 amendments were of little relevance to the authorization issues in  
10 *Shurgard* or here, as those amendments replaced the term “federal interest computer”  
11 with “protected computer.” 18 U.S.C. § 1030(a)(2)(C) (2008). In contrast the  
12 district court in *Werner-Masuda* relied heavily on the 1986 Senate report  
13 accompanying the CFAA. *Werner-Masuda*, 390 F. Supp. 2d at 497-499. The 1986  
14 amendments are the relevant ones because those are the amendments that added the  
15 term “exceeds authorized access.” 18 U.S.C. § 1030(a)(2)(C) (2008). This is the  
16 term at issue here because it is the part of the statute that reaches insiders who are  
17 allowed access for some purposes, but not for others. For this reason, *Werner-*  
18 *Masuda's* take on the legislative history of the CFAA is far more persuasive than that  
19 of the court in *Shurgard* on the critical issue of whether Defendant Drew gained  
20 unauthorized access or exceeding authorized access.

21 A few cases find that, in the civil employment context, the principles of  
22 agency mean that an employee accesses a computer “without authorization” if,  
23 without knowledge of the employer, the employee uses the employers computer  
24 system in a manner adverse to the employer's interests. *See, e.g., Int'l Airport Ctrs.,*  
25 *L.L.C. v. Citrin*, 440 F.3d 418, 420-421 (7th Cir. 2006); *ViChip Corp. v. Lee*, 438 F.  
26 Supp. 2d 1087, 1100 (N.D. Cal. 2006). Several earlier cases also found a CFAA  
27 violation for non-employees, but only after clear and repeated warnings that the  
28 user’s conduct was not authorized, and only under circumstances where the user

1 either had a fiduciary duty to the computer owner or where the access was for  
2 competitive commercial gain, facts significantly absent in this case. *See EF Cultural*  
3 *Travel BV v. Zefer Corp.* 318 F.3d 58 (1st Cir. 2003), (rejecting a CFAA claim based  
4 on a “reasonable expectations” test but stating in dicta that “a lack of authorization  
5 could be established by an explicit statement on the website restricting access”); *EF*  
6 *Cultural Travel BV v. Explorica Inc.*, 274 F.3d 577 (1st Cir. 2001) (finding CFAA  
7 liability where the defendant poached an ex-EF employee, who in turn revealed  
8 confidential information about his former employer which improved the competitor’s  
9 use of automated tools to search and “systematically glean company's prices from  
10 [competitor's] website”); *Southwest Airlines Co. v. FareChase Inc.*, 318 F. Supp. 2d  
11 435 (N.D. Tex. 2004) (defendant created an automated tool that “scraped” web site  
12 information and allowed corporate travelers to search online for airline fares,  
13 including Southwest’s. despite the plaintiff’s “repeated warnings and requests” to  
14 cease); *Register.com, Inc. v. Verio, Inc.*, 126 F. Supp. 2d 238 (S.D.N.Y. 2000) (court  
15 enjoined automatic searching of the registrant contact information contained in  
16 domain registry database after lawyers specifically objected to the defendant’s use  
17 and sent out a terms of use letter to the defendant), *aff’d in part as modified by*  
18 *Register.com, Inc. v. Verio, Inc.*, 356 F.3d 393 (2d Cir. 2004) (reversing the trial  
19 court's CFAA finding on the basis that there was insufficient likelihood of showing  
20 the \$5,000 damage threshold necessary for private claims, but upholding a trespass  
21 to chattels claim); *America Online Inc. v. LCGM, Inc.*, 46 F. Supp. 2d 444 (E.D. Va.  
22 1998) (“AOL”), (the defendant transmitted more than 92 million unsolicited and bulk  
23 e-mail messages advertising their pornographic Web sites to AOL members in  
24 violation of AOL's email policies and terms of use).

25 These civil cases are readily distinguished from the criminal prosecution of  
26 Defendant Drew here because all but *AOL* involve actual prior notice to the  
27 defendant that their computer access was unauthorized, rather than the mere posting  
28 of terms of service on a website which could be ignored or violated by a user. These

1 cases also all involve use of the plaintiff's computer service for the defendant's  
2 commercial advantage to the detriment of the computer system owner. *See* Lemley,  
3 91 Minn. L. Rev. at 476-77 (noting a greater willingness of some courts to enforce  
4 terms against businesses than against consumers). Here, Defendant Drew allegedly  
5 failed to provide truthful and accurate registration information; failed to refrain from  
6 using any information obtained from MySpace services to harass, abuse, or harm  
7 other people; failed to refrain from soliciting personal information from anyone  
8 under 18; failed to refrain from promoting information that she knew was false or  
9 misleading; and failed to refrain from posting photographs of other people without  
10 their consent. The indictment does not allege even that Defendant had seen or knew  
11 of these terms in the MySpace TOS, but she certainly did not receive any direct  
12 warnings to stop. Nor was she acting for commercial advantage in a way that could  
13 be seen as unfairly competing with or harming MySpace's business, factors  
14 important to the decisions in virtually all the above cases.

15         Apart from these important factual distinctions, for the reasons stated, these  
16 cases were wrongly decided, in light of the plain language and the legislative history  
17 of the CFAA.

18         **F. The Rule Of Lenity Requires The Narrower Interpretation Of The**  
19         **CFAA's "Access" Language**

20         The rule of lenity should guide the construction of section 1030 (a)(2)(C) in  
21 this case because the CFAA is first and foremost a criminal statute. *See Leocal v.*  
22 *Ashcroft*, 543 U.S. 1, 12 n.8 (2004); *United States v. Thompson/Center Arms Co.*,  
23 504 U.S. 505, 517-18 (1992). The rule of lenity "requires a court confronted with  
24 two rational readings of a criminal statute, one harsher than the other, to choose the  
25 harsher only when Congress has spoken in clear and definite language." *Shamrock*  
26 *Foods*, 535 F. Supp. 2d at 965-67 (plain language of the statute, legislative history  
27 and rule of lenity support a narrow view of the CFAA); *see Pasquantino v. United*  
28 *States*, 544 U.S. 349, 383 (2005); *McNally v. United States*, 483 U.S. 350, 359-60

1 (1987).

2 Here, because Congress has not proactively specified that the CFAA's  
3 "access" provisions criminalize mere violations of terms of service, the rule of lenity  
4 requires that courts adopt the "less harsh" interpretation. *See, e.g., United States v.*  
5 *Miranda-Lopez*, 2008 WL 2762392 at \*5 (9th Cir. July 17, 2008) ("the  
6 'longstanding' rule of lenity requires us to resolve any ambiguity in the scope of a  
7 criminal statute in favor of the defendant" (citations omitted)). This is the approach  
8 taken by the court in *Shamrock Foods Co.* in adopting the narrower interpretation of  
9 "accesses . . . without authorization or exceeds authorized access." The court there  
10 used the rule of lenity to reject imposition of CFAA liability on a disloyal former  
11 employee, concluding "[t]he approach advanced by Shamrock would sweep broadly  
12 within the criminal statute breaches of contract involving a computer. . . . *The Court*  
13 *declines the invitation to open the doorway to federal court so expansively when this*  
14 *reach is not apparent from the plain language of the CFAA."* *Shamrock Foods* at  
15 967 (emphasis added). *United States v. LaMacchia* reached a similar result as the  
16 rule of lenity would require. Because Congress had failed to criminalize non-  
17 commercial distribution of copyrighted materials, the Government was not entitled to  
18 stretch a broader statute regulating a different kind of conduct to punish admittedly  
19 bad conduct. *LaMacchia*, 871 F. Supp. 535 (D. Mass. 1994). If Congress wanted to  
20 criminalize the conduct at issue here, it could have. If Congress wanted to give the  
21 force of law to terms of service agreements, it can. But it did not, and the rule of  
22 lenity does not permit the Government to use the CFAA to reach that result.

23 **G. The Government's Previous Attempt In This District To Expand**  
24 **Civil Cases Interpreting the CFAA into the Criminal Context Led**  
25 **To The Wrongful Conviction And Incarceration Of An Individual**  
**For Constitutionally Protected Activities**

26 In a disturbingly similar expansion of civil CFAA cases to support a criminal  
27 prosecution under a different section of the CFAA, 18 U.S.C. § 1030(a)(5)(A), the  
28 United States Attorney's Office in this district from 2001 to 2003 prosecuted

1 computer programmer Bret McDanel, *United States v. McDanel*, Ninth Circuit Case  
2 No. 03-50135, Central District of California Case No. CR-01-638-LGB. McDanel  
3 worked for a Tornado, a Los Angeles firm that provided Web-based email and voice  
4 mail services. While employed there, he discovered a serious security flaw in the  
5 company's email system, which intruders could exploit to read customers' private  
6 messages. He brought the flaw to the company's attention, but it wasn't fixed. After  
7 he left Tornado, McDanel sent an anonymous email to Tornado customers,  
8 describing the security flaw, and directing customers to a website McDanel had set  
9 up providing more information. The Government indicted McDanel for violating the  
10 CFAA, alleging that because he *sent emails* to customers' Tornado.com email  
11 addresses, and these emails gave customers information that the company did not  
12 want its users to have, McDanel intentionally caused damage to the integrity of  
13 Tornado's email server. The Government relied heavily on *Shurgard's* agency law  
14 theory, arguing that McDanel acted without the best interests of Tornado in mind, so  
15 his emails were improper. McDanel was convicted and sentenced to 16 months in  
16 prison.

17 On appeal to the Ninth Circuit,<sup>7</sup> the Government reversed its position,  
18 "confess[ed] error," and moved to dismiss the charges against McDanel. (See  
19 *United States v. McDanel*, Government Brief, attached as Exhibit A, at 6, 8). While  
20 McDanel sent information to Tornado's servers, and while that information caused  
21 harm to Tornado's business (by reducing customer confidence in the privacy and  
22 security of their messages), the Government admitted that that type of harm could  
23 not be a CFAA violation unless it was intended to help someone illegally access the  
24 system or change data there. *Id.* at 8. The flaw in the current prosecution and that of  
25 McDanel is the same. The Government seeks to extend the reasoning of disfavored  
26 civil law cases from the employment or commercial context to argue that any use of

27 \_\_\_\_\_  
28 <sup>7</sup> Jennifer Granick, Civil Liberties Director with *amicus* Electronic Frontier  
Foundation, represented Mr. McDanel on appeal.

1 a computer server in a manner contrary to the interests of the server owner is a crime.  
2 As with the prosecution of Mr. McDanel, this prosecution is in error.

3 **II. APPLYING THE CFAA TO DEFENDANT’S CONDUCT IN THIS**  
4 **CASE WOULD CONSTITUTE A SERIOUS ENCROACHMENT ON**  
5 **FUNDAMENTAL CIVIL LIBERTIES, INCLUDING FREEDOM OF**  
6 **SPEECH**

7 **A. The First Amendment Assures The Right To Speak Anonymously**  
8 **Online**

9 Individuals have the qualified right to speak anonymously, including on the  
10 internet, so criminal prosecution for failing to supply accurate identifying  
11 information to an online communications service endangers First Amendment rights.  
12 Yet one of the alleged violations of the MySpace terms of service on which the  
13 Government bases this Indictment is Defendant’s use of a fictitious name in  
14 registering for an account. *See* Indictment at 6.

15 Average internet users may have numerous valid reasons for wanting to keep  
16 their identities secret. Individuals may want to protect themselves from unwanted  
17 attention or from unwanted advertising, even while the service providers hope to sell  
18 customer’s personally indentifying information or send advertising. They may wish  
19 to avoid having their views stereotyped according to their racial, ethnic or class  
20 characteristics, or their gender. They may be associated with an organization but  
21 want to express an opinion of their own, without running the risk that readers will  
22 assume that the group feels the same way. They may want to say or imply things  
23 about themselves that they are unwilling to disclose otherwise. And they may wish to  
24 present provocative ideas that they fear could subject them to retaliation. Not  
25 surprisingly, in a recent survey, almost one-third of social network users admitted to  
26 providing false information to protect their identities. Antony Savvas, *Social*  
27 *Network Users Hide Identities*, Computer Weekly, Sept. 25, 2007.

28 The Supreme Court has consistently upheld the right to anonymous speech in  
a variety of contexts, noting that “[a]nonymity is a shield from the tyranny of the  
majority . . . [that] exemplifies the purpose [of the First Amendment] to protect

1 unpopular individuals from retaliation ... at the hand of an intolerant society.”  
2 *McIntyre v. Ohio Elections Comm’n*, 514 U.S. 334, 357 (1995); *see also id.* at 342  
3 (“an author’s decision to remain anonymous, like other decisions concerning  
4 omissions or additions to the content of a publication, is an aspect of the freedom of  
5 speech protected by the First Amendment.”); *Gibson v. Fla. Legislative Investigative*  
6 *Comm.*, 372 U.S. 539, 544 (1963) (“[I]t is ... clear that [free speech guarantees] ...  
7 encompass[] protection of privacy association ...”); *Talley v. California*, 362 U.S.  
8 60, 64 (1960) (finding a municipal ordinance requiring identification on hand-bills  
9 unconstitutional, and noting that “[a]nonymous pamphlets, leaflets, brochures and  
10 even books have played an important role in the progress of mankind.”).

11 The First Amendment applies fully to internet communications, including  
12 email and the World Wide Web. *Reno v. ACLU*, 521 U.S. 844, 870 (1997) (there is  
13 “no basis for qualifying the level of First Amendment protection that should be  
14 applied to” the internet). Numerous courts have specifically upheld the right to  
15 communicate anonymously on the internet. *See, e.g., Doe v. 2TheMart.com Inc.*, 140  
16 F. Supp. 2d 1088, 1092 (W.D. Wash. 2001) (“The right to speak anonymously  
17 extends to speech via the internet. Internet anonymity facilitates the rich, diverse,  
18 and far ranging exchange of ideas.”); *ACLU v. Johnson*, 4 F. Supp. 2d 1029, 1033  
19 (D.N.M. 1998); *ACLU of Ga. v. Miller*, 977 F. Supp. 1228, 1230 (N.D. Ga. 1997);  
20 *see also ApolloMEDIA Corp. v. Reno*, 526 U.S. 1061 (1999), *aff’d* 19 F. Supp. 2d  
21 1081, 1085 n.5 (C.D. Cal. 1998) (protecting anonymous denizens of a web site at  
22 [www.annoy.com](http://www.annoy.com), a site “created and designed to annoy” legislators through  
23 anonymous communications); *Global Telemedia Int’l v. Does*, 132 F. Supp. 2d 1261,  
24 1267 (C.D. Cal. 2001) (striking complaint based on anonymous postings on Yahoo!  
25 message board based on California’s anti-SLAPP statute).

26 It is true that the constitutional privilege to remain anonymous is not absolute.  
27 Plaintiffs may properly seek information necessary to pursue reasonable and  
28 meritorious litigation. *Columbia Ins. Co. v. Seescandy.com*, 185 F.R.D. 573, 578



1 (N.D. Cal. 1999) (First Amendment does not protect anonymous internet users from  
2 liability for tortious acts such as defamation); *Doe v. Cahill*, 884 A.2d 451, 456 (Del.  
3 2005) (“Certain classes of speech, including defamatory and libelous speech, are  
4 entitled to no constitutional protection.”). Also, individuals can choose to waive their  
5 free speech rights, and courts may enforce confidentiality agreements over a First  
6 Amendment defense. *See Snepp v. United States*, 444 U.S. 507, 510 (1980) (*per*  
7 *curiam*). However, the law does not presume a waiver of constitutional rights in  
8 contract so courts give heightened scrutiny to the enforceability of such agreements.  
9 *Ohio Bell Tel. Co. v. Public Utilities Comm’n*, 301 U.S. 292, 307 (1937). To enforce  
10 such a contract, the waiver must not undermine the relevant public interest. *See D.*  
11 *H. Overmyer Co. v. Frick Co.*, 405 U.S. 174, 187-88 (1972).

12 In this case, even assuming, *arguendo*, that the MySpace TOS is privately  
13 enforceable in spite of its contractual infirmities and restrictions on protected  
14 anonymous speech, monetary damages, not criminal convictions and prison  
15 sentences, “are always the default remedy for breach of contract.” *United States v.*  
16 *Winstar Corp.*, 518 U.S. 839, 885 (1996) (plurality opinion). “Our system of  
17 contract remedies rejects, for the most part, compulsion of the promisor as a goal. It  
18 does not impose criminal penalties on one who refuses to perform his promise, nor  
19 does it generally require him to pay punitive damages.” *Canada Dry Corp. v. Nehi*  
20 *Beverage Co.*, 723 F.2d 512, 526 (7th Cir. 1983). Yet the Government’s  
21 construction of “without authorization or exceeds authorized access” in this case,  
22 based in part on Defendant Drew’s alleged failure to supply “truthful and accurate  
23 registration information,” Indictment at 5, 7, would make the assertion of protected  
24 anonymity the basis for criminal liability. While “[t]he Government may violate [the  
25 First Amendment] in many ways, . . . imposing criminal penalties on protected  
26 speech is a stark example of speech suppression.” *Ashcroft v. Free Speech Coal.*,  
27 535 U.S. 234, 244 (2002).

28 The First Amendment problems begin with, but do not end with, the right to

1 speak anonymously. Under the Government’s construction of the CFAA, speech  
2 that violates any terms of service would be unauthorized or in excess of authorization  
3 and potentially criminal. If the comment policy of a web site specified “no  
4 comments favorable to Democrats” or “no comments that are off-topic” or “no bad  
5 stuff” those expressions too would be swept into the reach of the CFAA.

6 **B. Constitutional Avoidance Dictates A Narrow Reading Of “Access”**  
7 **Under The CFAA**

8 This Court need not decide whether enforcing the CFAA would violate the  
9 First Amendment in this case. The mere fact that the question arises, however,  
10 requires this Court to interpret “exceeds authorized access” narrowly, so as to avoid  
11 a potentially unconstitutional application. “[I]t is a cardinal principle’ of statutory  
12 interpretation . . . that when an Act of Congress raises ‘a serious doubt’ as to its  
13 constitutionality, ‘this Court will first ascertain whether a construction of the statute  
14 is fairly possible by which the question may be avoided.’” *Zadvydas v. Davis*, 533  
15 U.S. 678, 689 (2001) (quoting *Crowell v. Benson*, 285 U.S. 22, 62 (1932)). A  
16 narrow construction of “unauthorized access” and “exceeds authorized access” – one  
17 which does not punish the failure to use truthful identification information when  
18 using online services that indicate an interest in collecting this data in their terms of  
19 use – is both possible and otherwise compelled by the statutory language and history  
20 of the CFAA.

21 **III. APPLICATION OF THE CFAA WHEN A USER IGNORES OR**  
22 **VIOLATES WEBSITE TERMS OF SERVICE WOULD VIOLATE DUE**  
23 **PROCESS AND RENDER THE STATUTE VOID FOR VAGUENESS**  
24 **AND LACK OF FAIR NOTICE**

25 Grounding criminal liability under section 1030(a)(2)(C), as the Government  
26 seeks to do here, on an interpretation of “access without authorization” and/or  
27 “exceeds authorized access” that is based entirely on whether a person has fully  
28 complied with the vagaries of privately created, frequently unread, generally lengthy  
and impenetrable terms of service would strip the statute of adequate notice to  
citizens of what conduct is criminally prohibited and render it hopelessly and

1 unconstitutionally vague. If the Government’s proposed construction of 18 U.S.C.  
2 1030(a)(2)(C) in this case is correct, not only the defendant but also potentially  
3 millions of otherwise innocent internet users would be committing frequent criminal  
4 violations of the CFAA through ordinary, indeed routine, online behavior which they  
5 have been given no reason to believe would make them felons. The lack of notice  
6 under the Government’s interpretation is stark; counsel for *amici* are not aware of a  
7 *single* criminal prosecution or conviction in the entire 22 years of the CFAA’s  
8 existence that has attempted to base criminal liability on disregard for the contractual  
9 terms of service on a website.

10 The Supreme Court has stated that,

11 “[i]t is a fundamental tenet of due process that ‘[n]o one may be  
12 required at peril of life, liberty or property to speculate as to the  
13 meaning of penal statutes.’ *Lanzetta v. New Jersey*, 306 U.S. 451, 453  
14 (1939). A criminal statute is therefore invalid if it ‘fails to give a person  
of ordinary intelligence fair notice that his contemplated conduct is  
forbidden.’ *United States v. Harriss*, 347 U.S. 612, 617 (1954).”

15 *United States v. Batchelder*, 442 U.S. 114, 123 (1979); *see also Grayned v.*  
16 *Rockford*, 408 U.S. 104, 108-09 (1972). A plurality of the Supreme Court has  
17 further specified that “[v]agueness may invalidate a criminal law for either of two  
18 independent reasons. First, it may fail to provide the kind of notice that will enable  
19 ordinary people to understand what conduct it prohibits; second, it may authorize and  
20 even encourage arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement.” *City of Chicago v.*  
*Morales*, 527 U.S. 41, 56 (1999) (Stevens, J., plurality opinion).

21 In the Ninth Circuit, “[t]o survive vagueness review, a statute must ‘(1) define  
22 the offense with sufficient definiteness that ordinary people can understand what  
23 conduct is prohibited; and (2) establish standards to permit police to enforce the law  
24 in a non-arbitrary, non-discriminatory manner.’” *United States v. Sutcliffe*, 505 F.3d  
25 944, 953 (9th Cir. 2007) (quoting *Nunez v. City of San Diego*, 114 F.3d 935, 940 (9th  
26 Cir. 1997). “Vague statutes are invalidated for three reasons: ‘(1) to avoid punishing  
27 people for behavior that they could not have known was illegal; (2) to avoid  
28

1 subjective enforcement of laws based on ‘arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement’  
2 by government officers; and (3) to avoid any chilling effect on the exercise of First  
3 Amendment freedoms.’” *Humanitarian Law Project v. Mukasey*, 509 F.3d 1122,  
4 1133 (9th Cir. 2007) (quoting *Foti v. City of Menlo Park*, 146 F.3d 629, 638 (9th Cir.  
5 1998)).<sup>8</sup>

6 Nothing in § 1030(a)(2)(C), its legislative history, or the case law interpreting  
7 it provides any sort of “fair notice” to citizens, including the defendant here, that  
8 such everyday behavior could constitute a federal crime. For at least the following  
9 four reasons the interpretation advanced by the Government would fall short of  
10 providing required notice and avoiding vagueness. Given that courts should adopt a  
11 narrow construction of a statute to avoid vagueness and other unconstitutional  
12 infirmities, *see Zadvydas v. Davis*, 533 U.S. at 689, the Government’s proposed view  
13 of the CFAA must be rejected.

14 **A. Web Site Terms of Service are Routinely Ignored or Not Fully Read**  
15 **or Understood**

16 The fallacy of any notion that internet users are on “fair notice” that  
17 disregarding the terms of service of the many web sites and web services they visit  
18 puts them at risk of serious criminal liability is revealed by the widespread (and  
19 widely accepted) understanding that large numbers of users never read these terms,  
20 or read and understand only limited portions of them.

21 First, terms are often poorly accessible. Many web sites or web-based services  
22 post their terms behind a “legal notices” or “terms of service” hyperlink which users  
23 can only access by scrolling to the bottom of the page and clicking on the link. To  
24 access the MySpace terms of use, for example, one must scroll down to find a  
25 hyperlink labeled “terms”. *See MySpace.com Home Page*, <http://www.myspace.com/>

26 <sup>8</sup> *See also United States v. Wunsch*, 84 F.3d 1110, 1119 (9th Cir. 1996) (finding that  
27 requirement in state bar statute incorporated in local rule to “abstain from all  
28 offensive personality” was unconstitutionally vague in the context of district court  
sanction of attorney).

1 (last visited July 28, 2008). Nothing about the link indicates that it is exceptionally  
2 important, much less that failure to click on it and read the underlying terms could  
3 subject the user to criminal penalties.

4         Second, the terms of service presented by many web sites and other online  
5 services are lengthy and impenetrable. In one particularly daunting example,  
6 Network Solutions, the domain name registrar, has a TOS that takes up 115 pages  
7 when pasted into a single spaced, 12-point font Microsoft Word document. *See*  
8 *Network Solutions Terms of Service*, [http://www.networksolutions.com/legal/static-](http://www.networksolutions.com/legal/static-service-agreement.jsp)  
9 [service-agreement.jsp](http://www.networksolutions.com/legal/static-service-agreement.jsp) (last visited July 28, 2008). The MySpace terms at issue here  
10 contain over 60 separate paragraphs or subparagraphs and takes up roughly ten pages  
11 when pasted into a Word document. *See Terms and Conditions—MySpace.com*,  
12 <http://www.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=misc.terms> (last visited July 28,  
13 2008).

14         Not surprisingly, then, many commentators recognize that few consumers  
15 actually take the time to read and understand digital terms of service (or similar  
16 software download agreements) before saying they agree to them. *See* Restatement  
17 (Second) of Contracts § 211, cmt. b (1981) (“Customers do not . . . ordinarily  
18 understand or even read the standard terms.”); Robert L. Oakley, *Fairness in*  
19 *Electronic Contracting: Minimum Standards for Non-Negotiated Contracts*, 42  
20 *Hous. L. Rev.* 1041, 1051 (2005) (“Clickwrap licenses are ubiquitous today, and  
21 most people click to accept without reading the text.”); Robert A. Hillman & Jeffrey  
22 J. Rachlinski, *Standard-Form Contracting in the Electronic Age*, 77 *N.Y.U. L. Rev.*  
23 429, 429-31 (2002) (“with increasing alacrity, people agree to terms [in clickwrap  
24 contracts] by clicking away at electronic standard forms on web sites and while  
25 installing software”); Michael I. Meyerson, *The Reunification of Contract Law: The*  
26 *Objective Theory of Consumer Form Contracts*, 47 *U. Miami L. Rev.* 1263, 1269 &  
27 nn.28-29 (1993) (citing cases recognizing the failure of most consumers to read form  
28

1 contracts).<sup>9</sup> In one notable example, public disregard for license terms was  
2 graphically illustrated by a software company that surreptitiously inserted into its  
3 license agreement an offer to pay \$1000 to the first person to send an email to a  
4 particular address. It took four months and more than 3000 installations before  
5 someone noticed the offer and claimed the prize. Jeff Gelles, *Internet Privacy Issues*  
6 *Extend to Adware*, Newark Star-Ledger, July 31, 2005, at 5. *See also Ting v. AT &*  
7 *T*, 182 F. Supp. 2d 902, 930 (N.D. Cal. 2002) (holding a customer service agreement  
8 procedurally unconscionable because lack of notice contributed to surprise, the court  
9 acknowledged that “AT & T's own research found that only 30% of its customers  
10 would actually read the entire CSA [consumer service agreement] and 10% of its  
11 customers would not read it at all”).

12 Similarly, empirical research confirms that, in the online context, a majority of  
13 users ignored the EULA entirely when installing such popular software as Google  
14 Toolbar on their home computers. Nathaniel Good et al., Commentary, *User*  
15 *Choices and Regret: Understanding Users' Decision Process About Consensually*  
16 *Acquired Spyware*, 2 I/S: J.L. & Pol’y for Info. Soc’y 283, 321 (2006). Furthermore,  
17 even the few people who do read the terms of service are unlikely to take notice of  
18 more than a handful of the provisions. Due to human cognitive limitations, even  
19 rational consumers will be ignorant of non-salient terms in form contracts. Melvin  
20 Aron Eisenberg, *The Limits of Cognition and the Limits of Contract*, 47 Stan. L. Rev.  
21 211, 244 (1995).

22 Moreover, as noted earlier, most website terms, like other form contracts, are  
23 long, written in impenetrable legalese and poorly organized. *See* Robert W.  
24 Gomulkiewicz, *Getting Serious About User-Friendly Mass Market Licensing for*  
25

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26 <sup>9</sup> In fact, research has shown that even participants in sophisticated business  
27 transactions routinely fail to read the terms of form contracts. Andrew Robertson,  
28 *The Limits of Voluntariness in Contract*, 29 Melbourne L. Rev. 179, 188 (April  
2005) (surveying empirical research).

1 *Software*, 12 Geo. Mason L. Rev. 687, 692-94, 701-02 (2004). Such contracts often  
2 written at a level of difficulty that exceeds the ability of most consumers to  
3 understand. See Alan M. White & Cathy Lesser Mansfield, *Literacy and Contract*,  
4 13 Stan. L. Rev. 233, 235-42 (2002). Drafters of these agreements give little  
5 attention to readability, instead relying heavily on legal boilerplate and including  
6 restrictive terms primarily designed to limit the company’s exposure to liability. See  
7 Gomulkiewicz, *supra*, at 692-94, 701-02; Russell Korobkin, *Bounded Rationality*,  
8 *Standard Form Contracts, and Unconscionability*, 70 U. Chi. L. Rev. 1203 (2003).  
9 Given the difficulty of comprehending form contracts, and the typically low-dollar  
10 amount of the transactions to which they apply, a consumers’ decision to forego  
11 reading a website’s terms of use is not only common, but entirely rational.  
12 Eisenberg, 47 Stan. L. Rev. at 240-44; Meyerson, 47 U. Miami L. Rev. at 1269-70.  
13 Thus, even persons who are conscientious about reading the terms of service may be  
14 unaware of some of the provisions. Under these circumstances, whatever the  
15 validity of holding such contracts enforceable for purposes of contract law, the  
16 transformation of their terms into the defining criteria for serious criminal violations  
17 creates serious risks of criminal sanctions for unwitting violations that cannot pass  
18 vagueness and notice review.<sup>10</sup>

19 **B. Web Site Terms Are Frequently And Arbitrarily Changed By Site**  
20 **Owners With Little Or No Likelihood Of Actual Notice To Users**

21 Many terms of service contain clauses which state that the website owner can  
22 unilaterally change the terms at any time, and that continued use of the website  
23 implies acceptance of the new terms. For example, the MySpace terms at issue here,  
24 even if actually read and understood by a user when he or she visits or signs up for

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25 <sup>10</sup> See Mark A. Lemley, *Terms of Use*, 91 Minn. L. Rev. 459, 465, 475-76 (2006)  
26 (observing that in civil cases “in today’s electronic environment, the requirement of  
27 assent has withered to the point where a majority of courts now reject any  
28 requirement that a party take any action at all demonstrating agreement to *or even*  
*awareness of terms* in order to be bound by those terms.”) (emphasis added). A  
similar lax view simply cannot provide “fair notice” in the criminal context.

1 an account, expressly state that they can be changed without further notice to the user  
2 merely by updating the agreement on the MySpace website – the user is then  
3 presumably obligated to review the entire terms for changes *every time* he or she  
4 visits. *See Terms and Conditions—MySpace.com*,  
5 <http://www.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=misc.terms> (last visited July 28,  
6 2008) (“MySpace may modify this Agreement from time to time and such  
7 modification shall be effective upon posting by MySpace on the MySpace Website.  
8 Your continued use of the MySpace Services after MySpace posts a revised  
9 Agreement signifies your acceptance of the revised Agreement. It is therefore  
10 important that you review this Agreement regularly to ensure you are updated as to  
11 any changes.”)<sup>11</sup> Under the Government’s expansive view of the CFAA, a person’s  
12 access to MySpace would be unauthorized or would exceed their authorization if that  
13 person used MySpace and inadvertently violated a newly added or updated provision  
14 of the terms that had been inserted since the last visit. However challenging such a  
15 view of notice to a contract’s terms may be for civil contract law, it fundamentally  
16 cannot be said to constitute adequate “fair notice” for due process vagueness  
17 purposes. *See Douglas v. U.S. Dist. Court for Cent. Dist. Calif.*, 495 F.3d 1062, 1066  
18 & n.1 (9th Cir. 2007) (holding that website users are not required to continually  
19 monitor a site's terms of use for possible changes).

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22 <sup>11</sup> *See, also e.g., West Terms of Use*, [http://west.thomson.com/about/terms-of-](http://west.thomson.com/about/terms-of-use/default.aspx?promcode=571404)  
23 [use/default.aspx?promcode=571404](http://west.thomson.com/about/terms-of-use/default.aspx?promcode=571404) (last visited July 28, 2008) (“By accessing,  
24 browsing, or using this website, you acknowledge that you have read, understood,  
25 and agree to be bound by these Terms. We may update these Terms at any time,  
26 without notice to you. Each time you access this website, you agree to be bound by  
27 the Terms then in effect.”); *AOL Terms of Use*,  
28 [http://about.aol.com/aolnetwork/aolcom\\_terms](http://about.aol.com/aolnetwork/aolcom_terms) (last visited July 28, 2008) (“You  
are responsible for checking these terms periodically for changes. If you continue to  
use AOL.COM after we post changes to these Terms of Use, you are signifying  
your acceptance of the new terms.”)



1           **C. Web Site Terms May Themselves Be Arbitrary, Vague, or**  
2           **Frivolous And Are Created by Private Site Owners for a Myriad of**  
3           **Business or Personal Reasons Having Nothing To Do With**  
4           **Regulating “Access” for CFAA Purposes**

5           Many web site terms contain conditions that are themselves vague, arbitrary or  
6           even fanciful. They are not written by their private drafters with the precision and  
7           care that would be expected – indeed required – of operative provisions in a criminal  
8           statute. Yet operative criminal provisions are precisely what routine business terms  
9           would be transformed into under the Government’s interpretation of § 1030(a)(2)(C).  
10          This fact multiplies the likelihood that such an interpretation cannot satisfy the due  
11          process requirement that a statute not “fail to provide the kind of notice that will  
12          enable ordinary people to understand what conduct it prohibits,” *Morales*, 527 U.S.  
13          at 56, since the statute will itself in turn rely for its essential meaning on the  
14          existence and clarity of separate contractual terms.

15          Web site owners and internet businesses draft specific web site and web  
16          service terms of use provisions for a variety of reasons that have nothing to do with  
17          regulating “access” to their sites, and certainly nothing to do with preventing the sort  
18          of unauthorized hacking or trespass or theft of private data with which the CFAA is  
19          properly concerned. Google, for example, presumably included the terms of use  
20          provision described earlier – barring use of its services by minors -- to protect itself  
21          against liability and to try to ensure its terms were binding in the event of a litigated  
22          dispute. Surely it did not mean – or imagine – that tens of millions of minors in fact  
23          would never use its services to obtain information or would do so at the risk of  
24          criminal liability. In another example, YouTube’s Community Guidelines, expressly  
25          incorporated into the site’s terms of use, prohibit “bad stuff.” *YouTube Community*  
26          *Guidelines*, [http://www.youtube.com/t/community\\_guidelines](http://www.youtube.com/t/community_guidelines) (last visit July 28,  
27          2008). Uploading “bad stuff” would violate YouTube’s terms which, under the  
28          Government’s theory here, would constitute unauthorized access or exceeding  
29          authorized access to the site. Surely YouTube did not draft the “bad stuff”

1 prohibition with CFAA access control in mind. The meaning of “bad stuff” is the  
2 essence of vagueness, and it is not even clear whose determination – YouTube’s? A  
3 jury’s? – would be required. To make sense and to avoid fatal vagueness problems,  
4 the terms “without authorized access” and “exceeds authorized access” in the CFAA  
5 must be limited to clear, proper purposes consistent with the statute’s goals, and not  
6 whatever commercial or personal purpose motivates a site owner to draft a provision  
7 in a terms of service document.

8 **D. Basing Criminal Liability On Private Contract Terms Inevitably**  
9 **Will Lead To Arbitrary And Discriminatory Enforcement**

10 Allowing the provisions of privately created, sometimes arbitrary or even  
11 frivolous web site terms of use to prescribe the legally critical CFAA standard for  
12 when a person has gained unauthorized access or exceeded authorized access to  
13 computers can only lead to arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement of the CFAA.  
14 Statutes that create the likelihood of such arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement  
15 are invalid. *See, e.g., Coates v. City of Cincinnati*, 402 U.S. 611, 614 (1971) (law  
16 disallowing three people to congregate if it is annoying to others was  
17 unconstitutionally vague, “not in the sense that it requires person to conform his  
18 conduct to an imprecise but comprehensible normative standard, but rather in the  
19 sense that no standard of conduct is specified at all”).

20 Choosing, as the Government has here, to prosecute under the CFAA a single,  
21 isolated instance of violating terms or service out of literally millions of similar,  
22 ongoing violations illustrates the dangers of arbitrary enforcement. In a world where  
23 each violation or neglect of a web site’s terms could constitute unauthorized or  
24 excessive access and be the basis for criminal prosecution, there simply is no  
25 limiting principle that would restrain the exercise of this enforcement discretion and  
26 prevent arbitrary or discriminatory application of the law.

1 **CONCLUSION**

2  
3 Megan Meier’s death was a terrible tragedy, and there is an understandable  
4 desire to hold the Defendant somehow accountable for it, if Defendant’s conduct was  
5 as alleged. But a dangerously overbroad construction of the CFAA would  
6 criminalize the everyday conduct of millions of internet users. The novel -- indeed,  
7 unprecedented in the history of the CFAA -- interpretation of § 1030(a)(2)(C)  
8 advanced in the indictment cannot be squared with the plain language of the statute,  
9 its legislative history, and the constitutional requirements that criminal statutes  
10 provide citizens fair notice, avoid vagueness and comport with the First Amendment.  
11 Consequently, amici urge the Court to dismiss the Indictment.  
12  
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14

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16  
17 DATED: August 1, 2008

By \_\_\_\_\_

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Certificate of Compliance with Circuit Rule 32-1

Pursuant to Rules 29(c)(5) and 32(a)(7)(C) of the Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure and Ninth Circuit Rule 32-1, I hereby certify that the foregoing brief uses 14-point Times New Roman spaced type; the text is double-spaced; and footnotes are single-spaced. This brief complies with the type-volume limitations of Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure 29(d) and 32(a)(7)(B) because there are no limits on the length of party briefs in support of motions to dismiss in criminal cases under Rule 12. This brief contains approximately 11,000 words.

DATED: August 1, 2008

By \_\_\_\_\_  
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1 **APPENDIX A**

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4 the institutions with which they are affiliated. Institutional affiliations are listed for  
5 identification purposes only.  
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