

INFORMATION SECURITY AND PRIVACY ADVISORY BOARD

*Established by the Computer Security Act of 1987
[Amended by the Federal Information Security Management Act of 2002]*

July 29, 2020

Dr. Walter G. Copan
Undersecretary of Commerce for Standards and Technology
Director, National Institute of Standards and Technology

Dear Dr. Copan:

I am writing to you as the Chair of the Information Security and Privacy Advisory Board (ISPAB). The ISPAB was originally created by the Computer Security Act of 1987 (P.L. 100-235) as the Computer System Security and Privacy Advisory Board, and amended by Public Law 107-347, and the E-Government Act of 2002, Title III, The Federal Information Security Modernization Act (FISMA) of 2014. The statutory objectives of the Board include identifying emerging managerial, technical, administrative, and physical safeguard issues relative to information security and privacy.

Many technology and security standards contain racially insensitive language that is both offensive to many of our colleagues and is also, in many respects, ambiguous – technically and culturally. Examples of such language include using the terms blacklist and whitelist instead of block-list and allow-list and using the terms master and slave. For a further discussion of this issue, see the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) Request for Comments (RFC) titled Technology Power and Offensive Language: <https://tools.ietf.org/id/draft-knodel-terminology-01.html>).

We recognize and endorse NIST's current efforts to replace such terminology and recommend that this process proceeds rapidly and that it be extended as far as possible to include the adoption of a common vocabulary of appropriate terms across other relevant U.S. Government agencies. We also recommend that NIST use its influence to extend this work to applicable private-sector standards organizations, as well.

I am available and happy to speak with the staff or individuals responsible to further discuss the board's insights and concerns.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. B. Lipner". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line extending from the end.

Steven B. Lipner
Chair
Information Security and Privacy Advisory Board