

UK reassures big tech over new encryption rules

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Instant messaging platforms have opposed UK government proposals to weaken end-to-end encryption.

The British government on Wednesday gave guarantees to instant messaging platforms over concerns that they could be forced to monitor

encrypted messages for harmful content.

Several [tech companies](#), including Meta-owned WhatsApp and Signal, voiced fears at a proposed law that could force them to stop end-to-end encryption of private communications.

But junior culture, media and sport minister Stephen Parkinson said the government had "no intention... to weaken the encryption technology used by the platforms".

"We have built in strong safeguards into the bill to ensure that users' privacy is protected," he told a debate in the upper chamber House of Lords.

The Online Safety Bill, currently making its way through parliament, has been introduced to crack down on [harmful content](#), including online child sex abuse.

Encryption is a feature of many instant messaging platforms but Parkinson said companies would not be forced into digital snooping of users.

UK communications regulator Ofcom "cannot require companies to use proactive technology on private communications in order to comply with these duties", he added.

"Ofcom can only require the use of a technology, a private communication service, by issuing a notice to tackle child [sexual exploitation](#) and abuse content."

Instead, it will only be able to require platforms to look at private messages "where technically feasible... in detecting only child sexual abuse and exploitation content".

Such technology, however, could be years away, if it ever emerges, according to experts interviewed by the Financial Times.

In an open letter in April, the heads of WhatsApp, Signal and Wire, among others, wrote an [open letter](#) underlining the privacy of their services.

"We don't think any company, government or person should have the power to read your personal messages and we'll continue to defend [encryption technology](#)," they said.

WhatsApp has previously said it would refuse to comply with the legislation, triggering speculation that the popular platform would leave the UK.

Element, a British instant messenger, had also indicated that it might leave the country if the law was passed.

The UK government assured at the time that it had no intention of "introducing routine reviews of private communications".

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