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MEMORANDUM

April 14, 2021

To: All Agencies

From: Alan Cunningham, State CIO

Subject: **Voice-Activated Devices in State Worksites or Home Worksites**

It has come to EITS' attention that voice-activated devices—which must listen to the sounds around them to hear their activation "wake word" and then carry out tasks per the voice commands given—are being used within state worksites. Unless the device is required as an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act or is specifically required by the agency for the performance of the employee's job, its presence is an unnecessary risk, and EITS strongly recommends that all such devices be removed.

These devices operate by recording a request and forwarding it to their company's servers. By default, the "wake word" is the device's name ("Siri," "Alexa," "Cortana," or "Hey Google"), but something that sounds similar can trigger the device to begin recording and transmitting. Additionally, the user may choose to add more "wake words" to the device, which increases the likelihood of accidental or unexpected recording. When the recordings are transmitted to the company's servers, the servers process the recording to identify the request and provide the answer or action back to the device. The requests may include background noise and other conversations. Those background conversations could include Protected Health Information (PHI), Personally Identifiable Information (PII), or other agency-sensitive information.

The inappropriate sharing or transmission of sensitive or protected information, whether intentional or accidental, is a violation of NRS 603A. It may also be considered a breach of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (known as HIPAA), federal tax information, Criminal Justice Information Services, or other federal regulations.

To avoid these security risks and possible violations of state and federal law, voice-activated devices should not be connected to the state network, and they should not be allowed physically within a state location, even when they are not connected to the state network. This includes all state locations. Additionally, EITS advises that voice-activated devices should not be used in a home office environment for the same reasons.

EITS also recognizes that many mobile phones have voice activation functionality and recommends that such functionality be disabled during work hours to protect against PHI, PII, or other secured information being accidentally disseminated.

Please contact your agency Information Security Officer if you have specific questions about the use of voice-activated devices in the workplace as they relate to your agency's information security policies.