A campaign recently launched in the United Kingdom demonizes encryption as something only a criminal would so much as want to use, and the rationale behind the "Eliminating Abusive and Rampant Neglect of Interactive Technologies" (EARN-IT) Act currently on the floor of the US Senate is much the same. Everywhere we turn, we find senators and talking heads claiming that governments around the world need to hold "Big Tech accountable," and they say one important step of that is banning end-to-end encryption. Criminals, they say, shouldn't be given a way to secure their communications from scrutiny. It's no surprise to hear governments pointing to crime as a way to justify encroachments on individual freedom -- or, for that matter, to use loaded words like "hide." Are you "hiding" when you lock the door of your home every day, just because the government is not permitted to enter it without a warrant? Is it "hiding" to seal the envelope of the card you're sending your Valentine? Even if you accept that this is hiding, end-to-end encryption is not only, or even primarily, for hiding from bulk government surveillance.

Anytime lawmakers begin to contemplate the so-called "rampant" misuse of end-to-end encryption, they would do well to reflect on the positive ways it's being used on a daily basis. A lot of time is (rightly) devoted to how it has protected whistleblowers like Edward Snowden, but end-to-end encryption has vital use cases that are much closer to home. Free, encrypted messaging, for example, helps protect queer youth from intolerant violence (at home and abroad, as in Ghana). At the same time, in a world where abusers can stalk their victims solely by hiding an AirTag in their bag, end-to-end encryption plays a direct role in helping victims out of these relationships by enabling them to contact friends for help. There are as many use cases for end-to-end encryption as there are people using it. To say otherwise shows not only a paucity of imagination, but is something that can only be spoken from a position of power and privilege.