

Thiel: Switching to official police devices promotes data protection, but has to be faster

Police messenger NIMes

The State Commissioner for Data Protection (LfD) Lower Saxony, Barbara Thiel, welcomes the announcement by the Lower Saxony Ministry of the Interior that it intends to use the police messenger NIMes only on official end devices in the future. In February, Thiel officially complained to the ministry that the messenger was being operated on police officers' private mobile devices. In his statement on this complaint, which was received by the LfD today, state police chief Axel Brockmann promised that the approach of "bring your own device" (BYOD) should be minimized by the purchase of official devices and "probably even completely eliminated in the future".

"The decision of the Ministry of the Interior to rely more and ultimately exclusively on service devices meets my requirements and enables the use of NIMes in accordance with data protection and IT security," says Barbara Thiel. "The complete switch to business smartphones is the best way to eliminate the risks of BYOD. However, I expect that the police will now follow their words with deeds more quickly than the statement by the state police chief suggests, and that the officers will finally be equipped with official equipment across the board. The current plans of the Ministry of the Interior are clearly too hesitant to consistently eliminate the existing risks."

In this context, the state data protection officer emphasized again that she had not objected to the NIMes application as such, but to its use on private smartphones. "In my view, NIMes is more privacy-friendly than many commercial messenger services. However, the employer's lack of control over private devices leads to an unacceptable risk, since the respective user is responsible for protecting his smartphone from attacks and malware. This in no way meets the protection requirements of the threatened data."

The LfD Lower Saxony cannot prohibit the police from using NIMes on private mobile devices because they do not have the necessary powers to do so.

Further information

Press release from February 17th, 2021: LfD Lower Saxony complains about the use of the police messenger NIMes on private devices

Press release as PDF