

# Top Authentication Fails in ASP.NET Core (and How to Avoid Them)



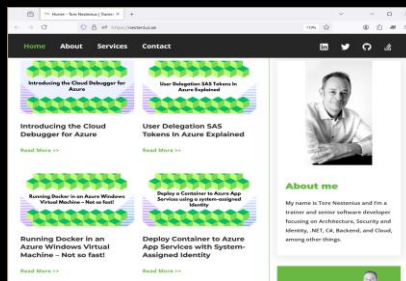
<https://nestenius.se>

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## About Tore Nestenius



Work <https://tn-data.se>



Blog <https://nestenius.se>



<https://meetup.com/net-skane>

<https://nestenius.se>

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## About Tore Nestenius



<https://nstenius.se>

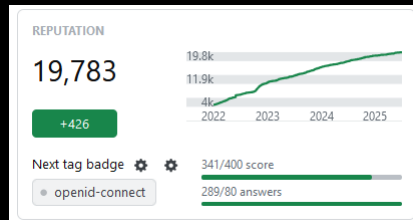
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## Background

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## Stack Overflow



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## What is the goal of this presentation?

- Explore common Authentication Problems
- Learn about various gotchas
- Production challenges

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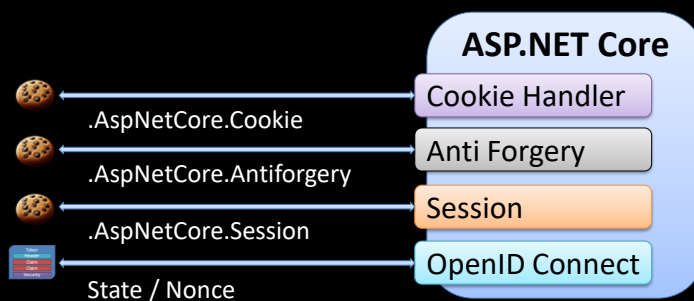
# Data Protection

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## Data Protection

ASP.NET Core issues several **sensitive items**, including:



It uses the **Data Protection API** to secure this

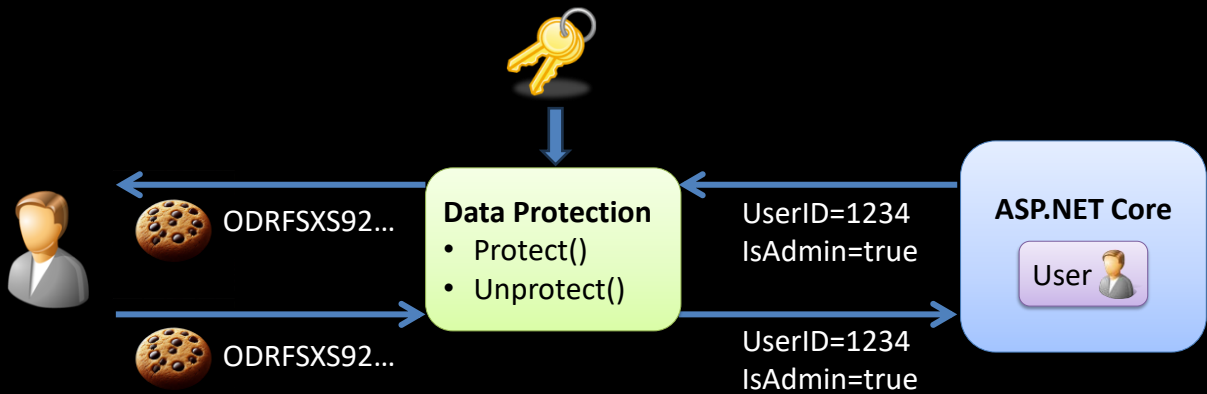
How does this work?

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## Data Protection

The data is secured using **encryption**



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## Demonstration

**Protect and Unprotect demo**

Purpose:

Encrypt:

Purpose:

Decrypt:

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# Data Protection in Production

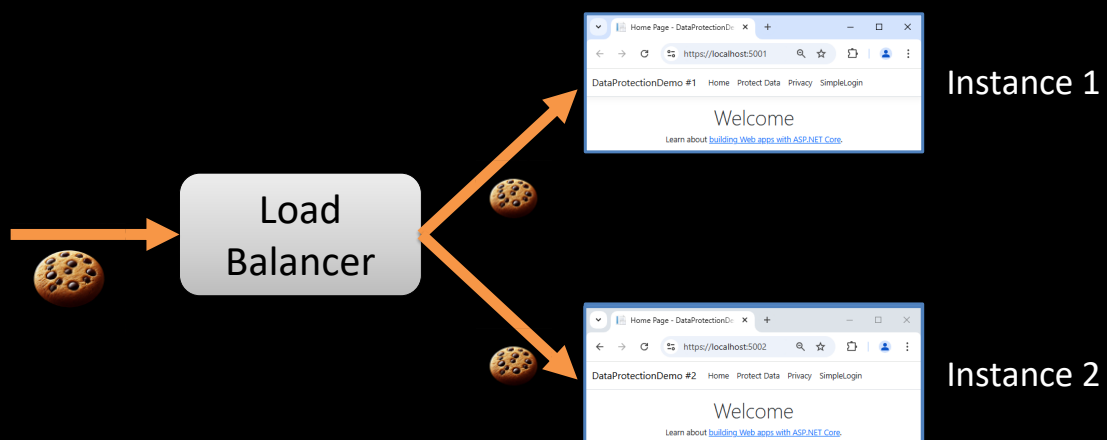
```
Key {} was not found in the key ring. Unprotect operation cannot proceed.  
cookie was not authenticated. Failure message: Unprotect ticket failed
```

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## Data Protection

### Example Architecture



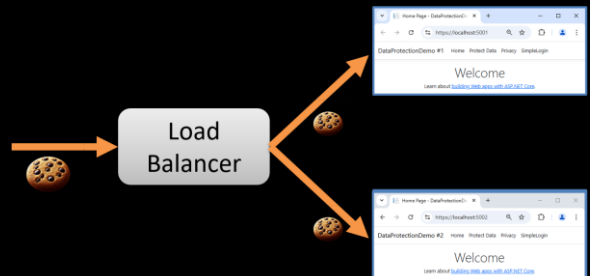
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## Data Protection

### What can go wrong here?

- Users lose their sessions after redeployment
- Cookies aren't recognized across instances
- Key management
- ...

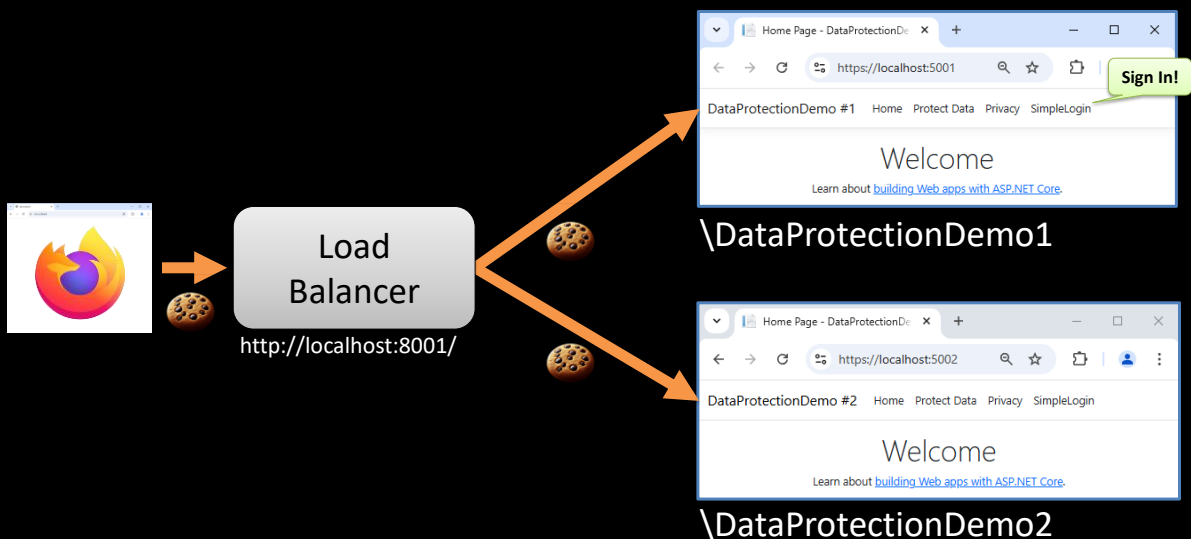


### What is the problem?

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## Demonstration – Cookies across service instances



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## Data Protection at Startup

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### Data Protection

By default, a **key** and a **key-ring** is created at startup

#### ASP.NET Core

```
appsettings.Development.json
appsettings.json
Controllers
HelloASPNETCore.csproj
Models
obj
Program.cs
Properties
Views
wwwroot
```

**Data Protection**

%LOCALAPPDATA%\ASP.NET\DataProtection-Keys

key-ea6eee38-7cd3-44d6-bc63-f0e7a2b57bc5.xml



```
>dotnet run
```

How will this work in our setup?

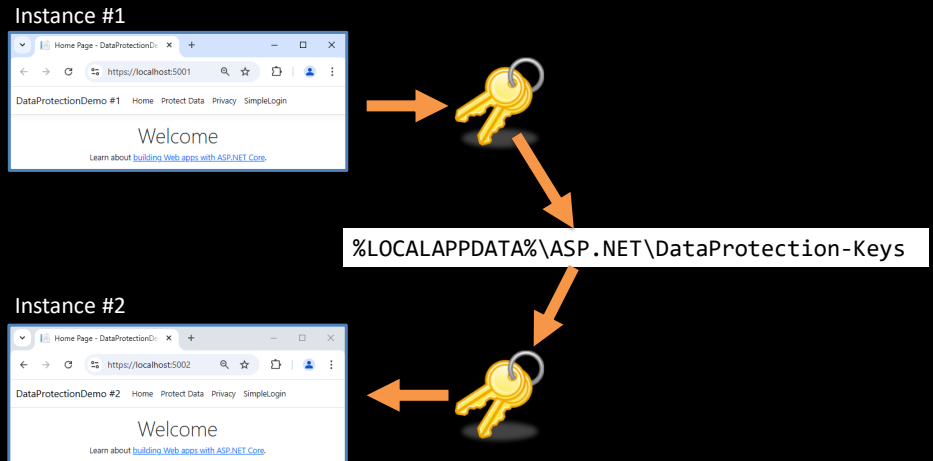
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## Data Protection

The following happens in our example:



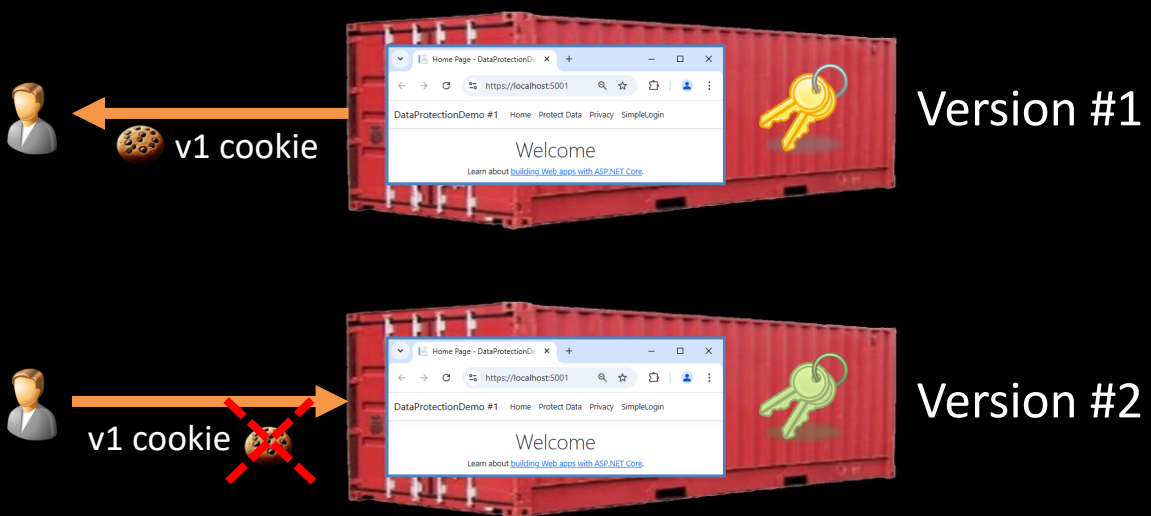
What can go wrong here?

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## Data Protection

Cookies will be rejected if the key changes after redeploy

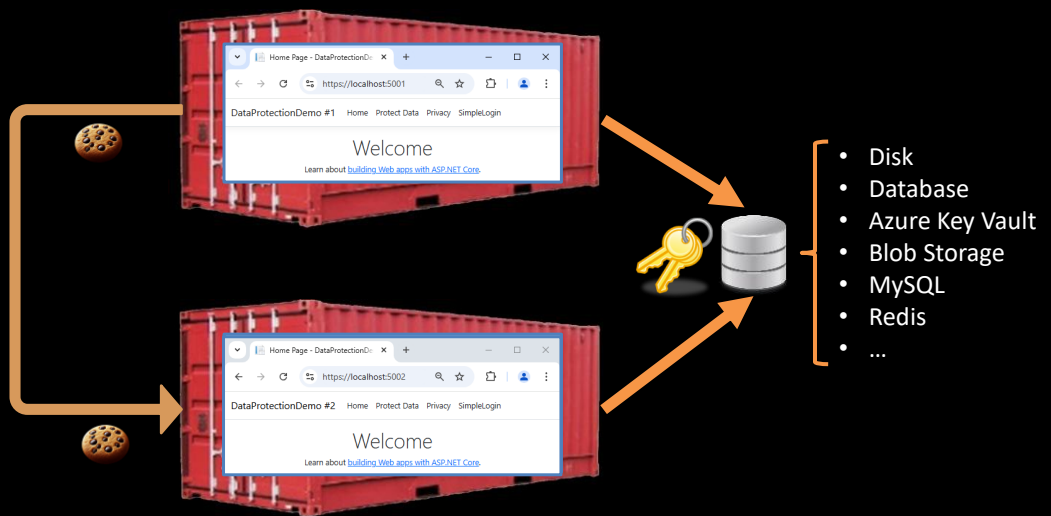


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## Data Protection

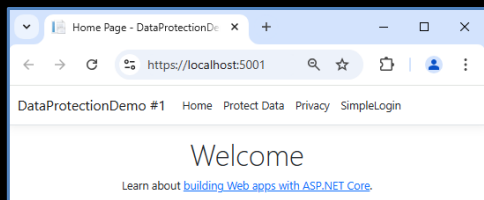
The **key-ring** needs to be persisted in a shared storage



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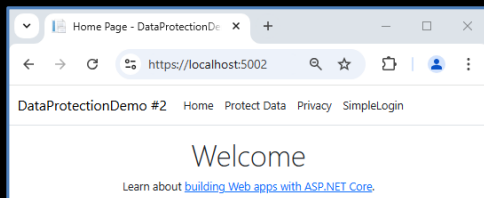
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## Demonstration – Persist Keys To File System



\DataProtectionDemo1

```
var keyPath = new DirectoryInfo(@"C:\Conf\Keys");  
builder.Services  
    .AddDataProtection()  
    .PersistKeysToFileSystem(keyPath);
```



\DataProtectionDemo2

```
var keyPath = new DirectoryInfo(@"C:\Conf\Keys");  
builder.Services  
    .AddDataProtection()  
    .PersistKeysToFileSystem(keyPath);
```

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## Data Protection Purpose

Protect and Unprotect demo

Purpose:  
CustomerData.v1

Encrypt:

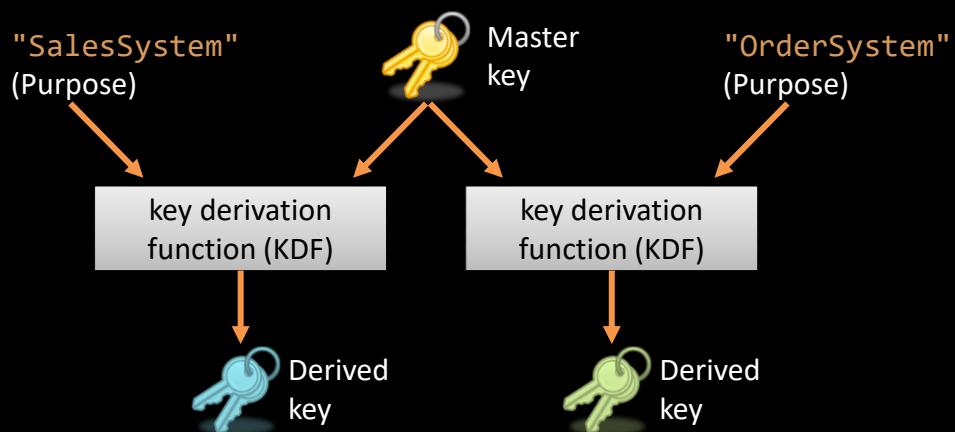
Encrypt

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## Data Protection Purpose

The **purpose** is used to create isolation



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## Demonstration - Purpose

### Why does this not work?

#### Instance #1

**Protect and Unprotect demo**

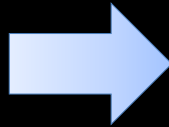
Purpose:  
CustomerData.v1

Encrypt:  
C# Rocks

**Encrypt**

Purpose:  
CustomerData.v1

Decrypt:  
CfDJ8Aqcfla-zj5GombFL7by0ilEEEn-u2a80TKpF  
osu7fWBtkzhdoTxSKRV3WmkTS7yKyZE0MZ-H  
NSrqWZyp-ZP5AylaVZmdnYMxCkZ6IYg



#### Instance #2

Purpose:  
CustomerData.v1

Decrypt:  
CfDJ8Aqcfla-zj5GombFL7by0ilEEEn-u2a80TKpF  
osu7fWBtkzhdoTxSKRV3WmkTS7yKyZE0MZ-H  
NSrqWZyp-ZP5AylaVZmdnYMxCkZ6IYg

**Decrypt**

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## Data Protection Purpose

### We actually have two purposes!

Purpose:  
CustomerData.v1

Decrypt:  
CfDJ8Aqcfla-zj5GombFL7by0ilEEEn-u2a80TKpF  
osu7fWBtkzhdoTxSKRV3WmkTS7yKyZE0MZ-H  
NSrqWZyp-ZP5AylaVZmdnYMxCkZ6IYg

**Decrypt**

Performing unprotect operation to key {bc7e21f3-69e3-45ce-bb5b-e9007bac85ed}  
with purposes ('C:\Conf\Demo - Data Protection\DataProtectionDemo1\  
'CustomerData.v1').

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## Data Protection Purpose

The **App path** is part of all purposes in ASP.NET Core:



Performing protect operation to key {...} with purposes (  
- 'C:\Conf\Demo - Data Protection\DataProtectionDemo1\  
- 'SessionMiddleware').



Performing protect operation to key {...} with purposes (  
- 'C:\Conf\Demo - Data Protection\DataProtectionDemo1\  
- 'Microsoft.AspNetCore.Authentication.Cookies.CookieAuthenticationMiddleware',  
- 'cookie',  
- 'v2').



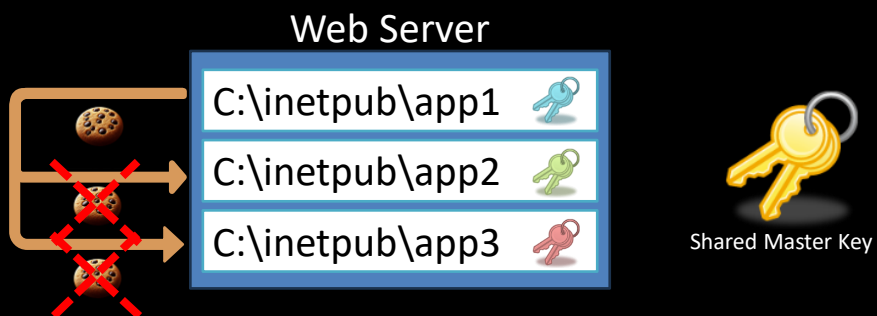
Performing protect operation to key {...} with purposes (  
- 'C:\Conf\Demo - Data Protection\DataProtectionDemo1\  
- 'CustomerData.v1').

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## Data Protection Purpose

We don't want different apps to trust the same cookie



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## Demonstration – Set Application Name

We can replace the path with an application name

```
var keyPath = new DirectoryInfo(@"C:\Conf\Keys");  
  
builder.Services.AddDataProtection()  
    .PersistKeysToFileSystem(keyPath)  
    .SetApplicationName("MyApplication");
```

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## Key Management Problems

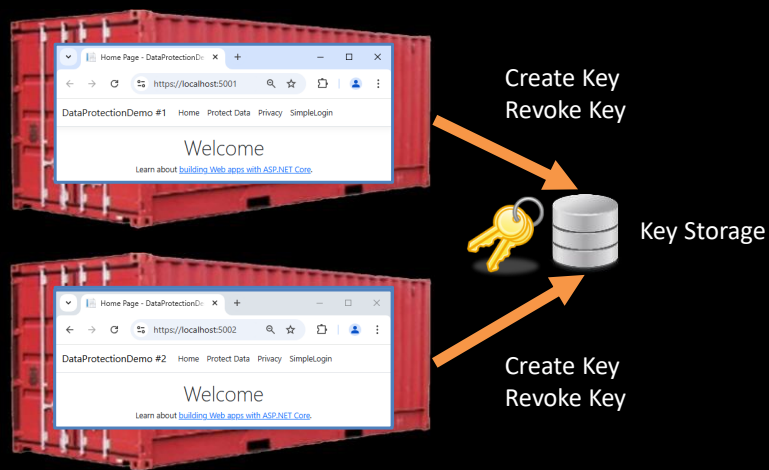


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## Key Management Problems

By default, both services wants to manage the keys



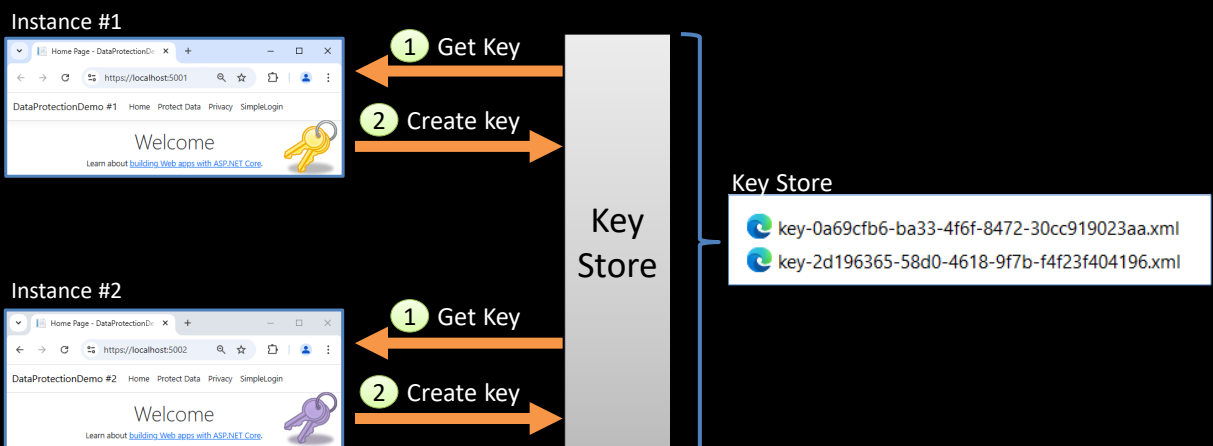
What can go wrong here?

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## Data Protection

What if both instances try to create a new key?



Why is this a problem?

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## Data Protection

# We can get a race condition!

### Instance #1

```
2025-02-03T16:28:44 Repository contains no viable default key.  
                      Caller should generate a key with immediate activation.  
2025-02-03T16:28:44 Policy resolution states that a new key should be added to the key ring.  
2025-02-03T16:28:44 Creating key {0a69cfb6-ba33-4f6f-8472-30cc919023aa} with  
                      creation date 2025-02-03 15:28:44Z, activation date 2025-02-03 15:28:44Z,  
                      and expiration date 2025-05-04 15:28:44Z.
```

### Instance #2

```
2025-02-03T16:28:44 Repository contains no viable default key.  
                      Caller should generate a key with immediate activation.  
2025-02-03T16:28:44 Policy resolution states that a new key should be added to the key ring.  
2025-02-03T16:28:44 Creating key {2d196365-58d0-4618-9f7b-f4f23f404196} with  
                      creation date 2025-02-03 15:28:44Z, activation date 2025-02-03 15:28:44Z,  
                      and expiration date 2025-05-04 15:28:44Z.
```

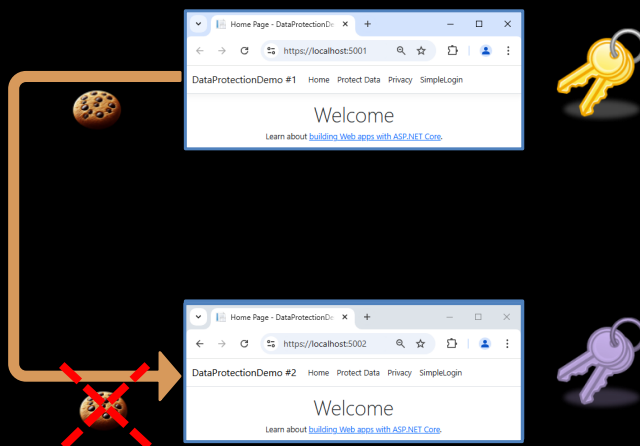
# Why is this a problem in production?

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## Data Protection

# Cookies will be rejected across service instances



# How can we solve this?

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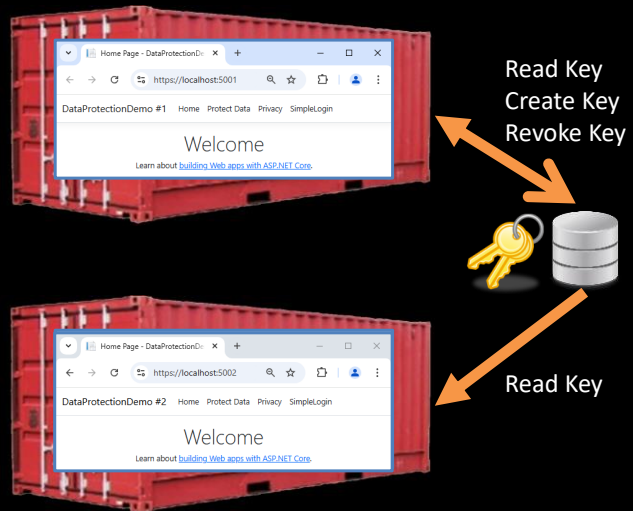


## Key Management Problems

You can control which instance can create keys

```
// Primary  
builder.Services.AddDataProtection()  
    .SetApplicationName("MyApplication");
```

```
// Secondary  
builder.Services.AddDataProtection()  
    .SetApplicationName("MyApplication")  
    .DisableAutomaticKeyGeneration();
```

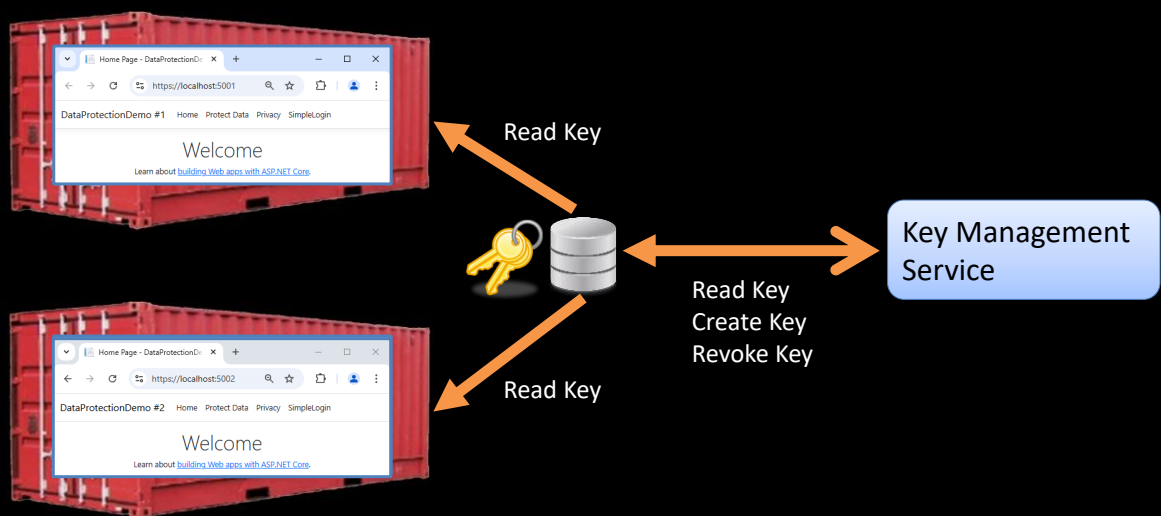


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## Key Management Problems

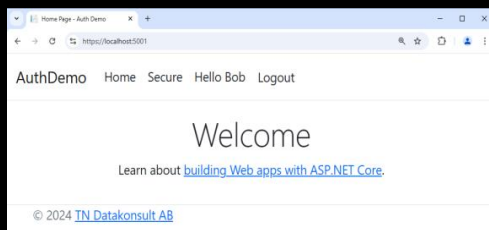
Or, you can use a separate service to manage keys



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## Part #2



<https://localhost:5001>

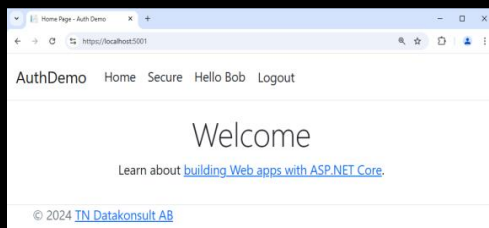
OpenID Connect Server  
(IdentityServer)

<https://identityservice.secure.nu>

<https://nstenius.se>

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## Problem #1 – HTTP-based Client



<http://localhost:5000>

OpenID Connect Provider  
(IdentityServer)

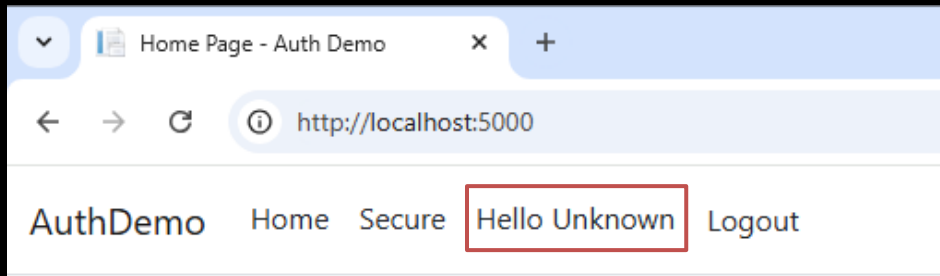
<https://identityservice.secure.nu>

<https://nstenius.se>

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## Problem #1 – HTTP-based Client

**OIDC** Authenticating over **HTTP** Works great!



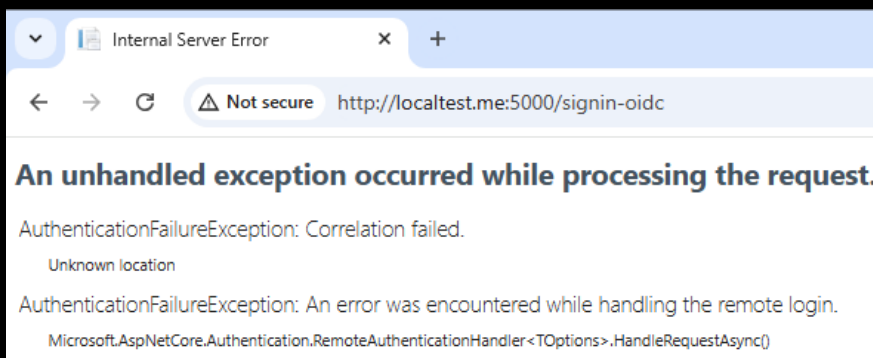
However, we have a problem!

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## Problem #1 – HTTP-based Client

Authenticating over a **non-localhost** domain fails!



Why does it work over **localhost**?

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## Problem #1 – HTTP-based Client

These are considered **Potentially Trustworthy**

- `http://127.0.0.1`
- `http://localhost`
- `http://*.localhost`
- `file://`

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## Demonstration

```
<h1>Is this context secure?</h1>
<p id="secure-status">Checking...</p>

<script>
  const isSecure = window.isSecureContext

  document.getElementById('secure-status').textContent =
    isSecure ? "Yes, this is a secure context." :
              "No, this is not a secure context.";
</script>
```

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## Problem #2 – Cookie Confusion

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### Cookie Confusion

#### What is the difference?

Name	Value	Domain	Path	Expires / Max-A...	Size
.AspNetCore.cookie	CfDJ8GiF8Bbiy1RlrW0...	localhost	/	Session	2968
.AspNetCore.Session	CfDJ8GiF8Bbiy1RlrW0...	localhost	/	Session	207

#### ASP.NET Core

- **AspNetCore.cookie**
  - User authentication session (User login)
- **AspNetCore.Session**
  - Temporary session data

Authentication  
Middleware



Session  
Middleware



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## Demonstration – Cookie Confusion

### Using the Session Service

AuthDemo Home SessionStorage SimpleLogin Login

## Session

This page writes to the Session storage.

Key	Value
Counter	3
Favourite blog	<a href="https://nstenius.se">https://nstenius.se</a>

Name	Value
.AspNetCore.Session	CfDJ8H7UB8P0hWRlprcSJ%2F30NfWqGIOJo41uMyEnMyMK...

Reload!

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## Cookies Ingredients

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## Cookies Ingredients

### What is inside the authentication cookie?

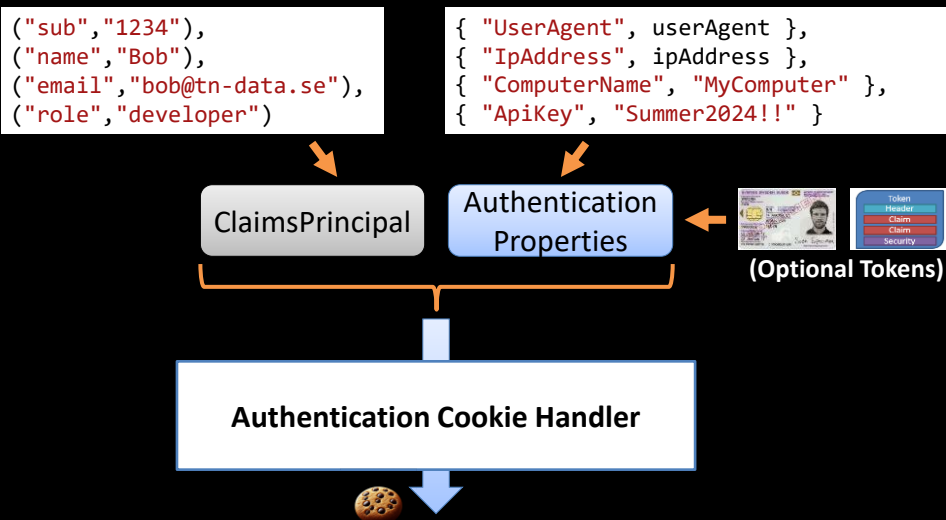
Name	Value	Domain	Path	Expires / Max-A...	Size
.AspNetCore.cookie	CfDJ8GiF8Bbiy1RlrW0...	localhost	/	Session	2968

Let's find out!

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## Cookies Ingredients

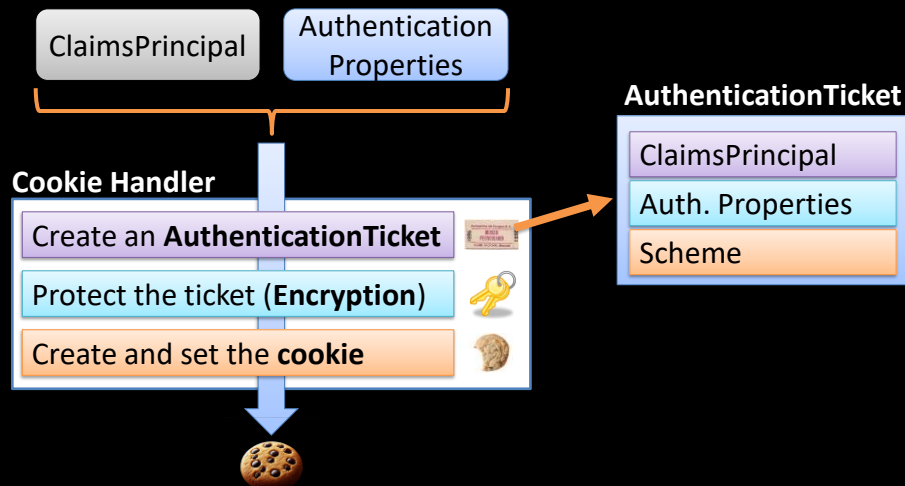


What happens inside the Cookie Handler?

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## Cookies Ingredients



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## What is inside the authentication cookie?

```
Set-Cookie: .AspNetCore.cookie=CfDJ8IgPXRNAZH1EkNA0dd3_JvtpV0ohM43sH81B8MW4
2T1L57tP0RRWmJu8svjUYUwIrYUOW4xo0ikC1OR3H87teUK4MYy58NBBAsjc8RDRWhK06JVz0HuHW1eNSfunLJ_000b
Z1y6kY1F521kzI8cw8VLPzG4zm33hoynL2JHLTCowbugN-3kyOLrUSyVJdotB1ANGcvBT-
jz2rAFu0eUbzCdXXDjm98YzW3E99QffLamD1LlrKe7MX1y31NWdxzQ39m4WmGwUNa3b0iHoyDaeSKJvifmzlMSWT_8o
9x4AUtzC6_whIOfPVHXhYkwCXGTwtPIYeb_KOGuAvidb3S3tTkK4m3LHcf5Fx9ajfbE8RC_5FLOsPxbQiQcF3KGmIUP
0dnHmtK7MHczg4UR-OgBh_TA_sKyMoPy9Ak9sa4P-XvMWWyssEk00zxfHbi6F
Vwbq5CNDe6W1QZG6z5PwtwGsVmx4vK8C3_4b9r-HU; path=/; secure; samesite=lax; httponly
```

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## Demonstration

```
.AddCookie(o =>
{
    o.DataProtectionProvider = new MyDataProtector();
});

public class MyDataProtector : IDataProtector
{
    public IDataProtector CreateProtector(string purpose)
    {
        return new MyDataProtector();
    }
    public byte[] Protect(byte[] plaintext)
    {
        return plaintext;
    }
    public byte[] Unprotect(byte[] protectedData)
    {
        return protectedData;
    }
}
```

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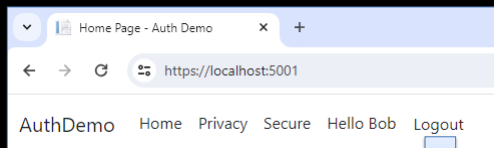
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## Insecure SignOut

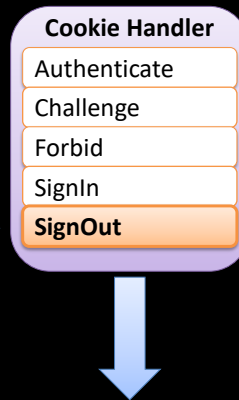
<https://nstenius.se>

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## SignOut



```
public async Task Logout()  
{  
    //Sign out from this specific scheme  
    await HttpContext.SignOutAsync("cookie");  
}
```



Set-Cookie: .AspNetCore.cookie=; expires=Thu, 01 Jan 1970 00:00:00 GMT; ...

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## Demonstration

Chrome Browser



Firefox Browser



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## Large Cookies



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## Large Cookies

**Multiple cookies** may be used to store the data

Name	Value	Domain	Path	Expires / Max-Age	Size
.AspNetCore.cookie	chunks-6	localhost	/	Session	26
.AspNetCore.cookieC1	CfDJ8GiF8Bbiy...	localhost	/	Session	4008
.AspNetCore.cookieC2	QNuTdN84L4...	localhost	/	Session	4008
.AspNetCore.cookieC3	9pxdjwuL0eGS...	localhost	/	Session	4008
.AspNetCore.cookieC4	tKp8dv4Y2Ld4...	localhost	/	Session	4008
.AspNetCore.cookieC5	vAP3IXzQr1hg...	localhost	/	Session	4008
.AspNetCore.cookieC6	UhpSm298k8...	localhost	/	Session	1334

Can we improve this? Yes, we explore this later!

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## Putting Your Cookies On A Diet

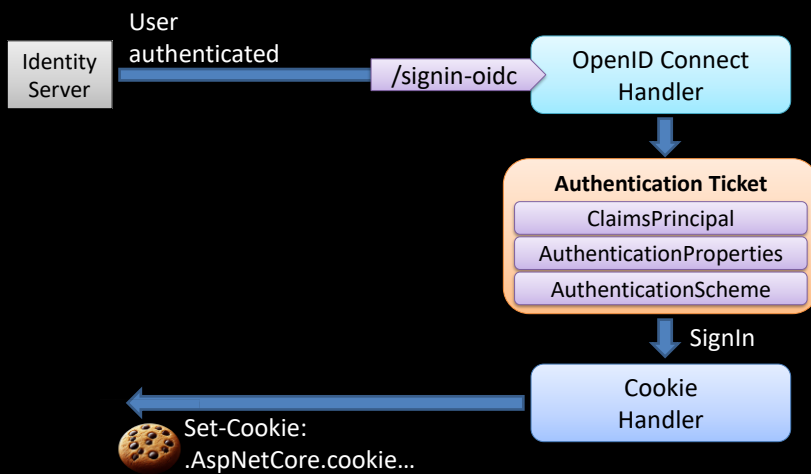


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## Putting Your Cookies On A Diet

### The authentication stack so far

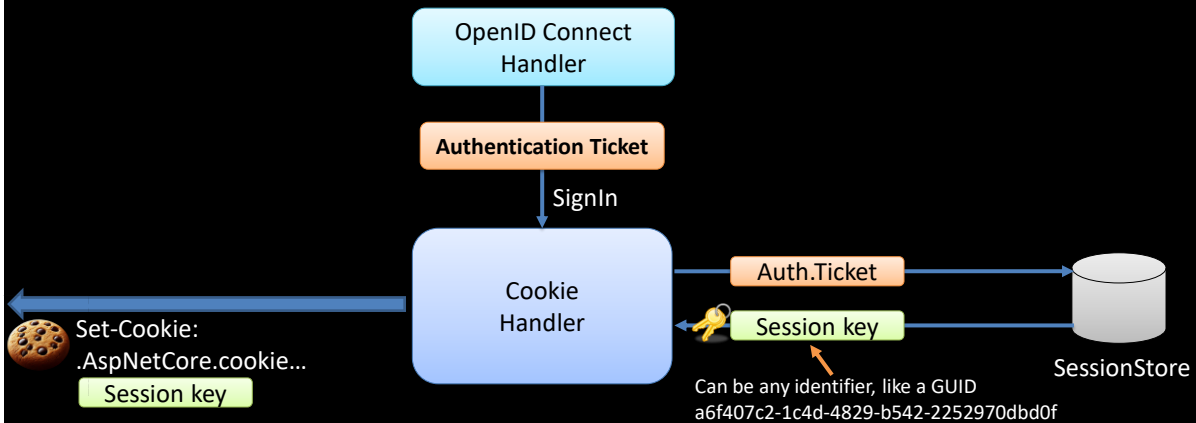


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## Putting Your Cookies On A Diet

We can add a cookie **SessionStore**

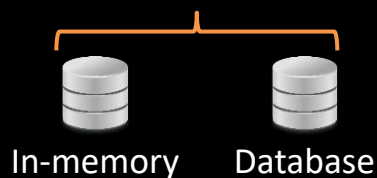


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## Putting Your Cookies On A Diet

```
public interface ITicketStore
{
    Task<string> StoreAsync(AuthenticationTicket ticket);
    Task RenewAsync(string key, AuthenticationTicket ticket);
    Task<AuthenticationTicket> RetrieveAsync(string key);
    Task RemoveAsync(string key);
}
```



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## Demonstration – Minimalistic SessionStore

```
public class MySessionStore : ITicketStore
{
    private readonly ConcurrentDictionary<string, AuthenticationTicket> mytickets = new();

    public async Task RemoveAsync(string key)
    {
        if (mytickets.ContainsKey(key))
            mytickets.TryRemove(key, out _);
    }

    public async Task RenewAsync(string key, AuthenticationTicket ticket)
    {
        mytickets[key] = ticket;
    }

    public async Task<AuthenticationTicket> RetrieveAsync(string key)
    {
        return mytickets.TryGetValue(key, out var ticket) ? ticket : default;
    }

    public async Task<string> StoreAsync(AuthenticationTicket ticket)
    {
        var key = Guid.NewGuid().ToString();
        if (mytickets.TryAdd(key, ticket))
            return key;
        else
            throw new Exception("Failed to add entry to MySessionStore");
    }
}

.AddCookie("cookie", o =>
{
    o.SessionStore = new MySessionStore();
});
```

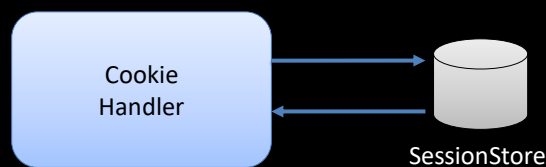
This also solves  
the SignOut issue



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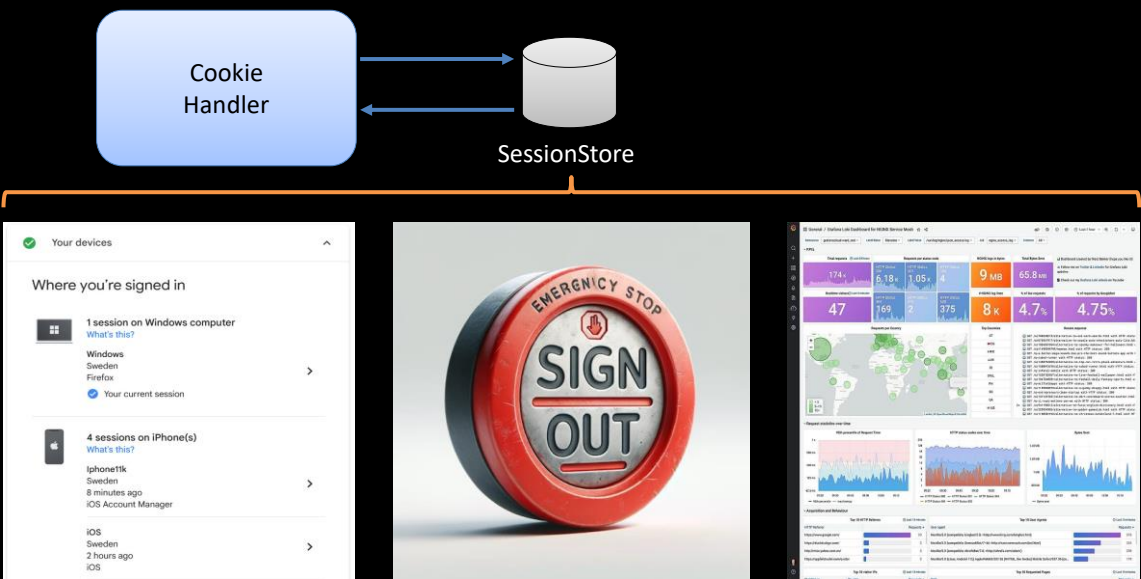
## Possibilities using a Session Store



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# Possibilities using a Session Store

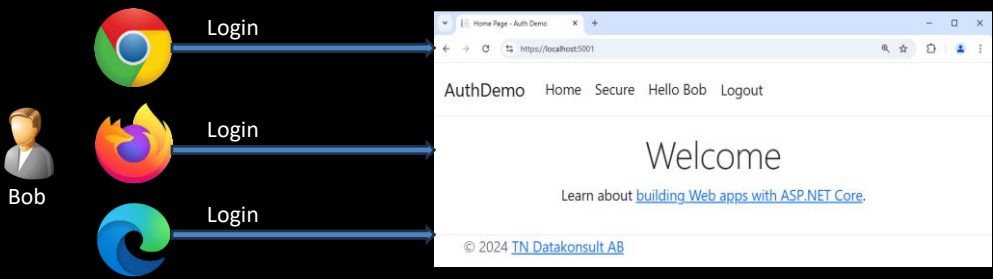


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# Demonstration – Advanced SessionStore

```
.AddCookie("cookie", o =>
{
    ...
    o.SessionStore = new AdvancedSessionStore();
})
```



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# Insecure Redirects

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## Insecure Redirect

### What is the problem?

```
[HttpPost]
[ValidateAntiForgeryToken]
public async Task<IActionResult> Login(LoginModel loginCredentials)
{
    var claims = new List<Claim>()
        { new("sub", "1234"), new("name", "Bob") };

    var identity = new ClaimsIdentity(claims, "pwd");
    var principal = new ClaimsPrincipal(identity);

    await HttpContext.SignInAsync(scheme: "cookie", principal);

    return Redirect(loginCredentials.ReturnUrl);
}
```

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## Demonstration – Introducing LocalRedirect

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the title 'Login - Auth Demo'. The address bar displays the URL 'https://localhost:5001/SimpleLogin/Login?ReturnUrl=%2FSimpleLogin'. The page has a navigation bar with links: 'AuthDemo', 'Home', 'SimpleLogin', 'SessionStorage', and 'Login'. The main content area is titled 'Login' and contains two input fields: 'UserName' with the value 'bob' and 'Password' with the value 'bob'. Below the password field is a blue 'Login' button. At the bottom of the page, there is a copyright notice: '© 2025 [Tore Nstenius](https://nstenius.se)'.

```
return LocalRedirect(loginCredentials.ReturnUrl);
```

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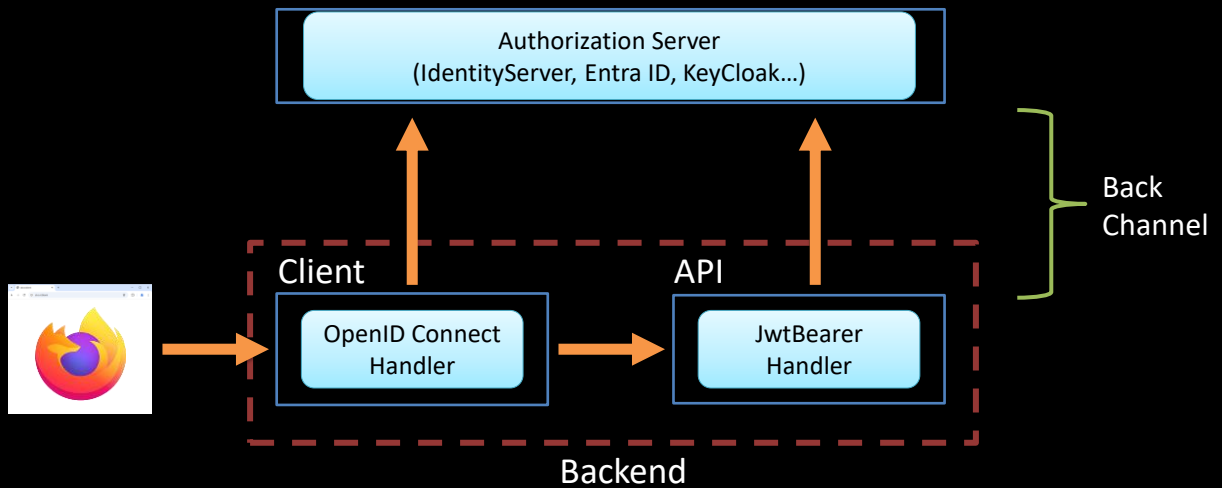
## The Back-Channel

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## The Back-Channel

This is secure backend communication in OIDC

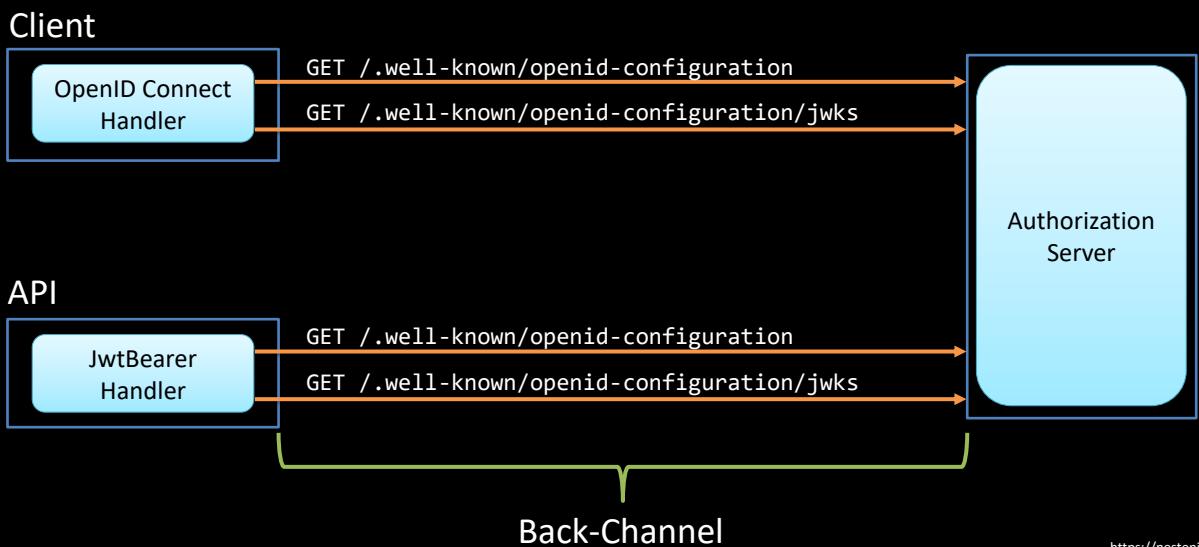


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## The Back-Channel

At startup, OIDC clients download the configuration



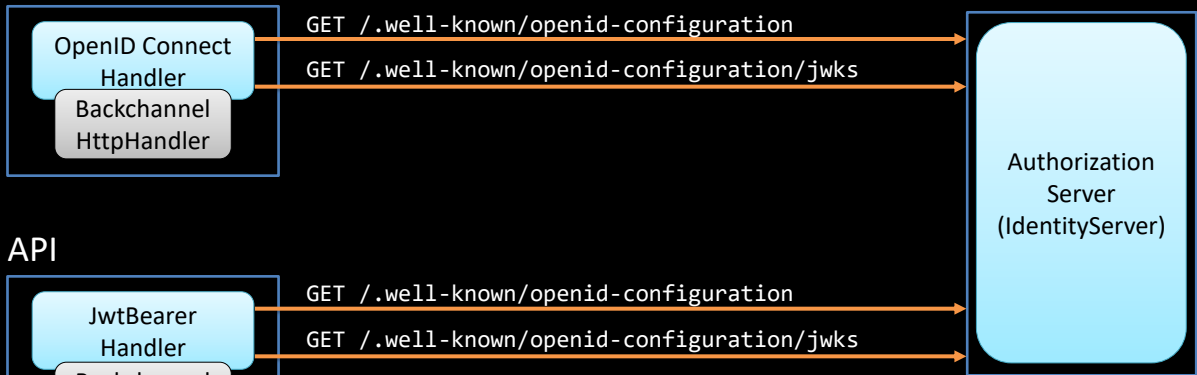
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## The Back-Channel

This traffic can be captured

### Client



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## Demonstration – Logging the Back-Channel

```
public class BackChannelListener : DelegatingHandler
{
    public BackChannelListener() : base(new HttpClientHandler())
    { }

    protected async override Task<HttpResponseMessage> SendAsync(HttpRequestMessage request,
                                                                    CancellationToken token)
    {
        var sw = new Stopwatch();
        sw.Start();

        var response = await base.SendAsync(request, token);

        sw.Stop();

        // TODO...

        return response;
    }
}
```

```
o.BackchannelHttpHandler = new BackChannelListener();
```

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## Demonstration – Logging the Back Channel – Part 2

```
var responseContent = await response.Content.ReadAsStringAsync();

var url = request?.RequestUri?.AbsoluteUri;
var timeTaken = sw.ElapsedMilliseconds.ToString();

WriteToLog("");
WriteToLog($"### BackChannel request to {url} took {timeTaken} ms");

// HACK: Never run this in production
WriteToLog("#####");
WriteToLog(responseContent);
WriteToLog("#####");
WriteToLog("");
```

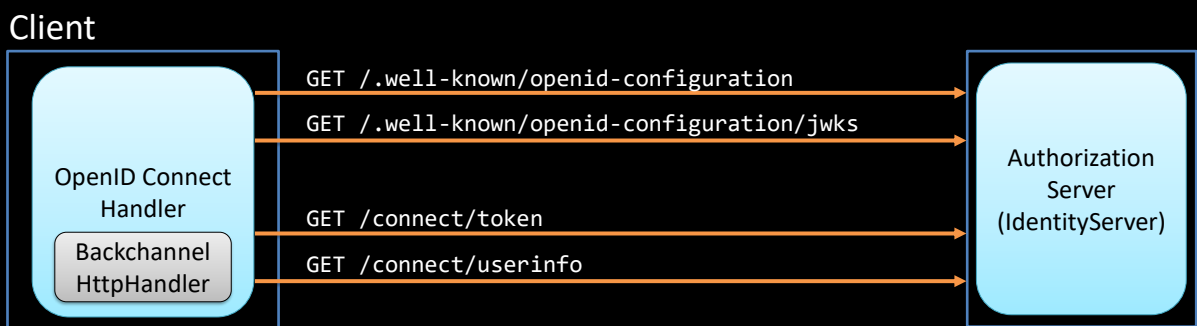
```
private static void WriteToLog(string message)
{
    Log.Logger.ForContext("SourceContext", "BackChannelListener")
        .Information(message);
}
```

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## Demonstration – Logging the Back-Channel – Part 3

We will see the following requests in the output



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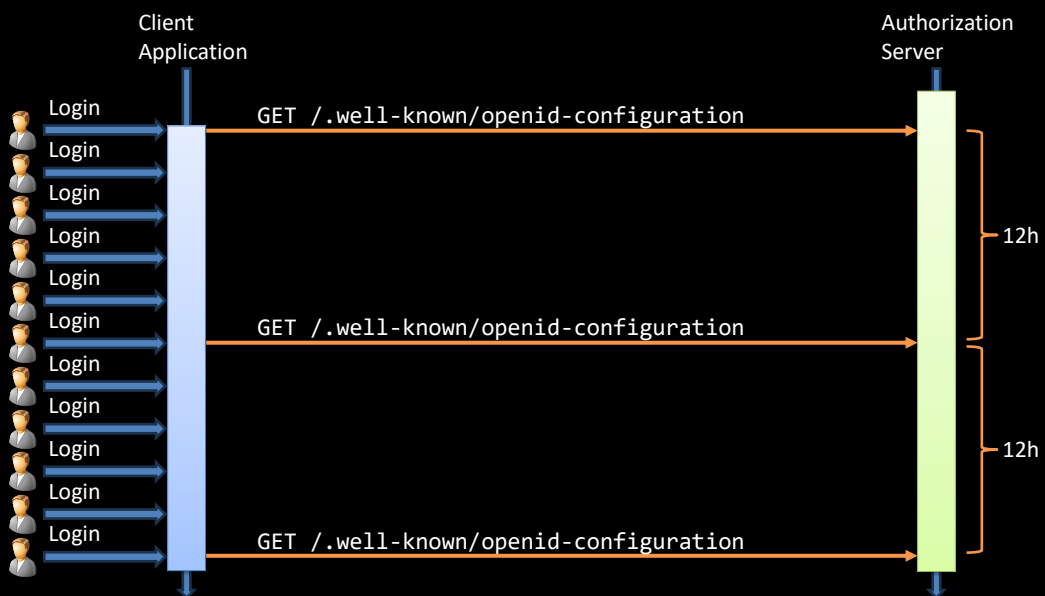
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# Back-Channel Trouble

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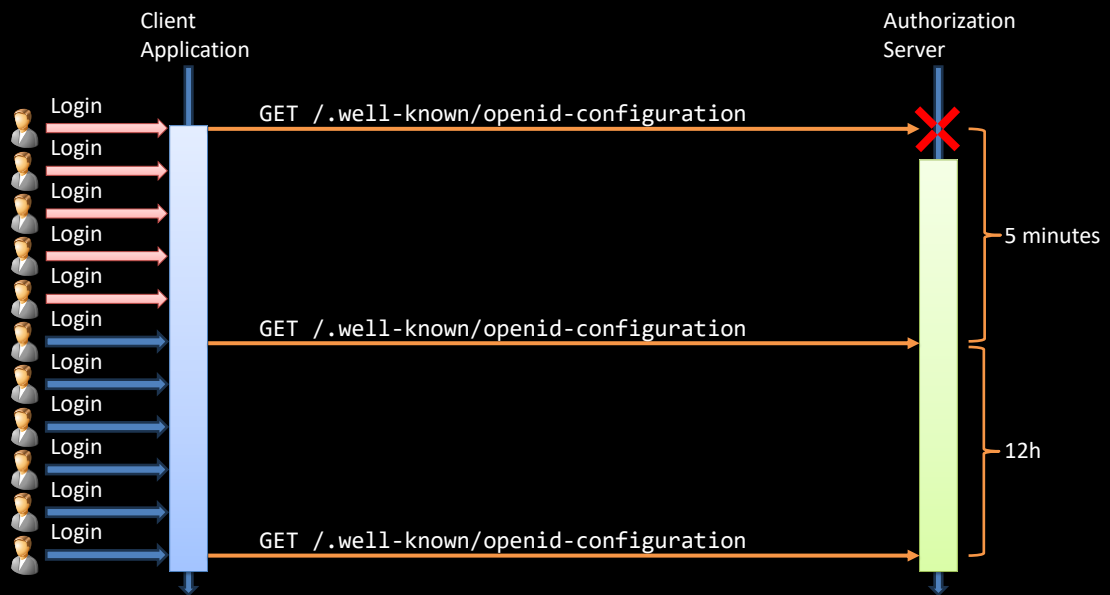
## Back-Channel Trouble



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## Back-Channel Trouble



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## What changed in Version 6.0.26?

September  
2024



**Microsoft.AspNetCore.Authentication.OpenIdConnect** by Microsoft  
ASP.NET Core middleware that enables an application to support the OpenID Connect authentication workflow.

6.0.26

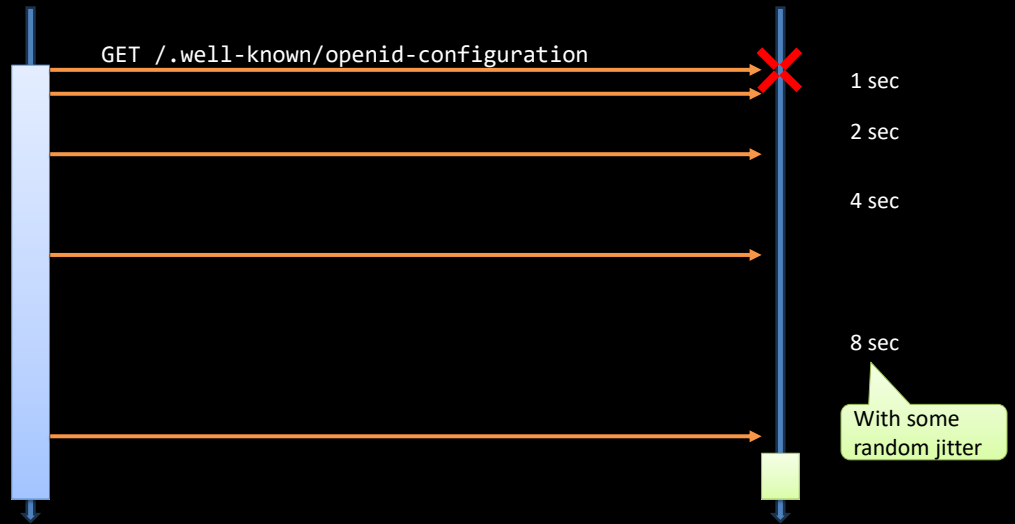
9.0.0

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## Back-Channel Trouble

They introduced **exponential backoff** at startup

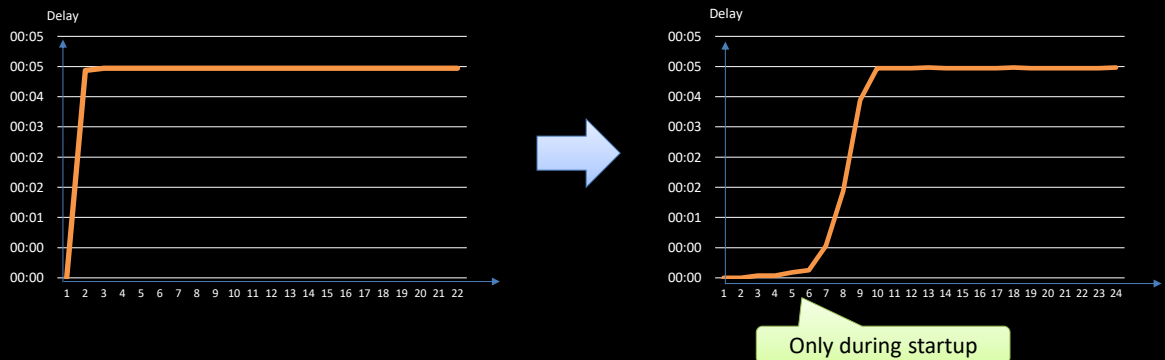


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## Back Channel Trouble

Comparing Old and New Behavior



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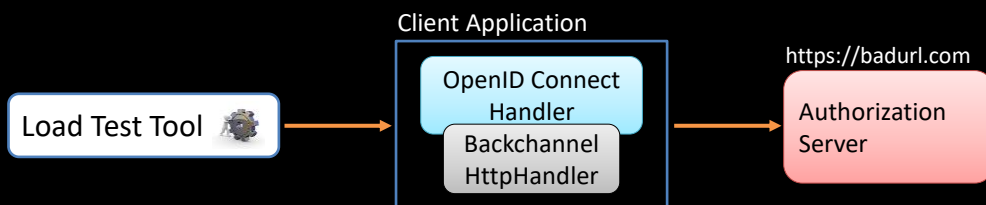
## Demonstration - Back Channel Trouble

```
.AddOpenIdConnect("oidc", o =>
{
    o.Authority = "https://badurl.com";

    o.BackchannelHttpHandler = new BackChannelRetryHandler();
    o.BackchannelTimeout = TimeSpan.FromMilliseconds(500);
});
```

CTRL + F5

```
// Stop sending the logs to the console
Log.Logger = new LoggerConfiguration()
    .WriteTo.Console()
    .CreateLogger();
```



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## Demonstration - Back Channel Trouble

### Before 6.0.26

```
00:00 - https://badurl.com/.well-known/openid-configuration
05:00 Diff: 05:00 - https://badurl.com/.well-known/openid-configuration
10:00 Diff: 05:00 - https://badurl.com/.well-known/openid-configuration
15:00 Diff: 05:00 - https://badurl.com/.well-known/openid-configuration
...
```

### After

```
00:00 - https://badurl.com/.well-known/openid-configuration
00:00 Diff: 00:00 - https://badurl.com/.well-known/openid-configuration
00:02 Diff: 00:01 - https://badurl.com/.well-known/openid-configuration
00:03 Diff: 00:01 - https://badurl.com/.well-known/openid-configuration
00:08 Diff: 00:04 - https://badurl.com/.well-known/openid-configuration
00:18 Diff: 00:10 - https://badurl.com/.well-known/openid-configuration
00:42 Diff: 00:23 - https://badurl.com/.well-known/openid-configuration
01:05 Diff: 00:23 - https://badurl.com/.well-known/openid-configuration
02:41 Diff: 01:35 - https://badurl.com/.well-known/openid-configuration
05:46 Diff: 03:05 - https://badurl.com/.well-known/openid-configuration
10:47 Diff: 05:00 - https://badurl.com/.well-known/openid-configuration
15:47 Diff: 05:00 - https://badurl.com/.well-known/openid-configuration
20:48 Diff: 05:00 - https://badurl.com/.well-known/openid-configuration
25:48 Diff: 05:00 - https://badurl.com/.well-known/openid-configuration
...
```

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# The end!

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this at your company for free?



Presentation and code

<https://github.com/tn-dataab/PublicBlogContent>

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