

Consumer Privacy in State Up for Grabs

As advances in technology have made it easier for entities of all kinds to share and sell personal data, the ACLU's work to protect the privacy of personal information has grown. In September, ACLU-WA Privacy Project Director Doug Klunder testified before a new state Consumer Privacy Task Force. He emphasized that the group's work should focus on enabling individuals to prevent information about him or herself that was obtained for one purpose from being used or made available for other purposes without his or her consent. The ACLU believes that this principle must lie at the heart of all privacy policies, and that any recommendations must also take into account how the policies will be enforced.

Washington Attorney General Christine Gregoire formed the task force this summer to review issues involved with the gathering and sharing of personal consumer information, examine the adequacy of current state consumer protection and privacy laws, and recommend possible changes to strengthen privacy protections. The task force has held public hearings in early September in Seattle and Spokane and is holding monthly workgroup meetings through December. Throughout this process, the ACLU-WA will stay actively involved to ensure that recommendations made by the task force effectively protect individual data privacy.

In addition, the ACLU-WA will work during the upcoming legislative session to pass several bills which would further secure personal data privacy. One ACLU-drafted bill calls for an inventory to be taken of all state-run electronic databases containing personally identifiable information about Washington residents. This is important so we can determine whether the state is accumulating too much information about its residents and work toward deciding how to better manage that information. A second bill crafted by the ACLU prohibits cable companies from revealing to third parties the cable services an individual subscriber receives or the extent or nature of a subscriber's use of cable services. This measure came in response to cable company TCI's claim that it has the right to market lists of its subscribers and information about subscribers' particular services.

We will also be working to support legislation that delays implementation of a state law passed last year requiring the Department of Licensing (DOL) to collect Social Security Numbers (SSN) of all license applicants. The state law was adopted in response to federal legislation pertaining to child support enforcement, which has yet to be implemented. This bill would delay DOL collection of SSNs until the federal government decides when to implement its law. ■