

PROTECTING OUR PRIVACY IN AN AGE OF TECHNOLOGY

Government, business and others can now easily capture and compile our personal information electronically – even when we’re on the go. Whether they use tiny circuits in our cars, clothes or credit cards, we must take steps to protect our privacy.

Why We Need Laws to Protect Privacy

Washingtonians may not even know when they have embedded devices transmitting personal information. Hidden electronic devices can store identifying numbers, photos, names, addresses and other information that can be used for identification purposes. Already, our information is stored in a variety of technologies, from 2-D barcodes to RFID tags that can be read from a distance. Without laws to regulate their use, these powerful tools can easily compromise our privacy.

There is growing recognition that something needs to be done. Washington state should be a leader in providing protections for its residents while guiding technological innovation.

What We Want Lawmakers to Do

1) Require Individual Consent before Third Parties Can Collect Personal Information

When others can collect and use information for purposes different than what we intend, we must be able to choose what information to give up on a case-by-case basis. Business and government should have to get individual consent before information collected for one purpose is used for another. And in order to make an informed choice, we must receive notice that is easy to understand.

2) Protect the Privacy of Our Information

Washingtonians should not risk identity theft simply by using products or services that incorporate technology. To reduce our risk, government and business should gather and keep only information that is relevant to the services provided, and should do so only with a person’s authorization.

3) Protect Our Right to Move Freely Without Being Tracked

Traditionally Americans have been able to move and act independently, without others being able to know everything we’ve done. Yet emerging technologies can track where we are, where we’ve been and predict where we’re going – painting a portrait that reveals the intimate details of our private lives. Lawmakers should regulate how organizations can aggregate and use this sensitive information.

4) Protect Our Identifying Numbers

Increasingly, serial numbers are used to identify us for electronic transactions – from loyalty cards, to transit passes, to credit cards. We must treat these “unique identifying numbers” as personal information to avoid unwanted tracking and surveillance. If we broadcast the same numbers everywhere we go, we might as well have them tattooed on our forehead.

5) Make Organizations Responsible for Protecting the Data They Hold

Many businesses and government agencies digitize our personal information and store it in offices around the world. As a result, our ability to protect this information is drastically reduced – instead we must rely on those holding our private data. Organizations storing our personal information should be liable for any invasions of privacy that result from their business practices or negligence.

We call on Washington policy-makers to support our privacy, security and freedom by implementing these principles.

