

# BCLA joins national pro-privacy coalition: Members called to action

By Leanna Jantzi.

In September, BCLA became the first library association to join the Protect Our Privacy Coalition – <http://OurPrivacy.ca> – the largest pro-privacy coalition ever formed in Canada.

The Protect Our Privacy Coalition consists of more than 35 public interest organizations, businesses, experts, privacy advocates, and concerned citizens.

"We are a very diverse and broad-based coalition that unites Canadians from all parts of the political spectrum - privacy is not a partisan issue," said David Christopher of OpenMedia.ca.

Unlawful government spying on Canadians strikes at the heart of our Charter rights to privacy and freedom of expression, Christopher said.

"No matter where you stand on the political spectrum, nobody wants government bureaucrats staring over their shoulder, reading their emails, or analyzing who they talk to or where they visit on the Internet.

"We're at a tipping point right now where either we stand up and protect our fundamental freedoms or we could easily end up in a situation where blanket government surveillance becomes part of the Canadian reality. That's why it's so important for Canadians to speak up right now and tell decision-makers to implement strong, legally enforceable safeguards to protect our privacy."

## Privacy protection a "core issue" for libraries

The decision to join the coalition was "obvious," said BCLA President Gwen Bird: "The issues involved are so clearly in line with BCLA's values and what the Association stands for."

Protection of individual privacy is a core issue for libraries and for BCLA, Bird said, pointing out that libraries have a long and proud history of protecting the privacy of patron records.



"In the digital era this is more important, and more complex, than ever," Bird said. "With so many library resources and services now delivered over the network, we need to know there's private space for ideas to be explored and expressed."

BCLA Information Policy Committee Chair Myron Groover echoed Bird: "We don't permit the government to snoop into the borrowing records of our patrons, so how can we possibly accept intrusive, non-consensual scrutiny into what our patrons are doing online using our computers?"

The coalition is reaching out to other library associations to encourage them to join.

"Libraries play a hugely important role at the heart of local communities across British Columbia and Canada" Christopher said. "We also appreciate how privacy is a core value dear to librarians and library patrons. Librarians have a particularly strong understanding of how privacy is essential for intellectual freedom and freedom of expression."

## Raising awareness, instigating action

The coalition aims to place privacy squarely on the national agenda, Christopher explained. "Whether it's speaking out against unlawful government surveillance on law-abiding Canadians, or against the threat that the government will resurrect aspects of its failed online spying Bill C-30, we're determined to ensure that decision-makers respect the privacy rights of every resident of Canada."

Christopher said that the impetus for the coalition arose because Canada has recently seen several large data breaches by the federal government, along with legislative initiatives that threaten the personal privacy of Canadians and come with a steep economic cost to taxpayers. Additionally, concerns over privacy have been compounded by

recent revelations that the private data of law-abiding Canadians is being collected by our federal spy agency, the Communications Security Establishment Canada (CSEC). The CSEC, he said, is about to receive a new taxpayer supported one billion dollar, 72,000-square-metre compound in Ottawa.

Moving forward, BCLA will stay informed, distribute information to members, and advocate as necessary to bring attention to the issues, and pressure on government and regulators as appropriate, Bird said: "Our voice will be more effective in all of this as part of such a broad-based coalition."

The IPC is striking a working group around surveillance and privacy that will continue to monitor developments and co-ordinate advocacy efforts, Groover added.

Both Bird and Groover emphasize the importance of individual BCLA member involvement and engagement in the issue.

"As individual members and library workers, talk about online privacy with your friends, family, co-workers," Bird said. "People have a greater awareness of the issue than ever right now, especially since the NSA revelations in the US earlier this year. We can all help our friends and neighbors make the connection with what's going on in Canada."

The most important action members can do to support the coalition's campaign is "to get educated about what precisely is happening with surveillance both in Canada and abroad," Groover said.

"Library workers can and should make good use of that information at the level of our day-to-day

#### Protect Our Privacy Coalition statement

"More than ever, Canadians need strong, genuinely transparent, and properly enforced safeguards to secure privacy rights. We call on Government to put in place effective legal measures to protect the privacy of every resident of Canada against intrusion by government entities."

interactions with users," he said. "Take the time to explain surveillance and its implications to patrons when opportunities to do so present themselves; I have found that such 'teachable moments' abound and that library users are generally very receptive to these ideas."

Groover added that members can also sign on as individuals to [support the coalition](#) and that they can support the BCCLA [lawsuit against CSEC](#).

Bird also suggested that there are opportunities for engagement and participation within institutions.

"This is a prime time to organize events, invite speakers and initiate discussion about online privacy," she said. "For those working in academic libraries, it presents an excellent opportunity to connect professionally with faculty and researchers working on these issues – they may be in Communications, Journalism, Public Policy, or elsewhere. We can seek them out and share the library's role and expertise."

#### Learn more

There are numerous places for BCLA members to get more information on this issue, including:

- Electronic Frontier Foundation: <https://www.eff.org/>
- Canadian International Council's OpenCanada.org: <http://opencanada.org/indepth/the-end-of-privacy/>
- OpenMedia.ca: <https://openmedia.ca/>
- BC Civil Liberties Association: <http://bccla.org/>
- BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association: <http://fipa.bc.ca/home/>
- Michael Geist: <http://www.michaelgeist.ca>
- IPC blog: <http://bclainfopolicycommittee.wordpress.com>
- IPC listserv: <http://www.bclibraries.ca/listservs/bcla/>
- Myron Groover's blog: <http://bibliocracy-now.tumblr.com/>

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