

Welcome to *Tuesday Topics*, a monthly series covering topics with intellectual freedom implications for libraries of all types. Each message is prepared by a member of OLA's Intellectual Freedom Committee or a guest writer. Questions can be directed to the author of the topic or to the [IFC committee](#).



US Senate Committee Hearing and Privacy Laws

In the Internet-age, our sense of privacy seems a misnomer. When online businesses commodify user information while hiding behind arcane privacy policies it incentivizes a sort of one-way transparency. This imbalance has manifested itself in the public psyche in the form of data breaches and Facebook's ethical misconduct. Following unfavorable media coverage, and a din of public outcry, the US Government is looking to update its privacy laws in order to grant users more control over the personal information that is supplied to private enterprise.

The Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation held a hearing on September 26th attended by representatives from Internet-industry giants like Twitter, Amazon, and Google. The purpose of the hearing was to elicit input from tech companies on what they could do to better protect consumer data privacy. Notably absent from the guest list were consumer advocates, or anyone to offer a second opinion, which stoked critics' fears that this represents the industry's big push for enterprise-friendly federal privacy legislation. With the recent spate of State-enacted privacy laws, it is believed that such a ruling would override laws at the State level and give companies the legal authority to quash attempts to pass stricter privacy legislation.

While the tenets of privacy embody values that librarians cherish, these potential changes to US privacy law transcend our profession. This affects all who use these media, including the very libraries that provide access to, and engage with these online platforms.

In recognition of these facts, The Office of the Federal Register has provided a platform for public comments on the issues surrounding consumer data privacy measures. Guidelines for submitting comments can be found under the *Addresses* heading at the beginning, as well as *Instructions for Commenters* at the end. These comments will be considered in the drafting of such laws, and will be part of the public record. I recommend reading the outline on the philosophy behind future policy, and the questions provided near the end of the document in order to guide your comments. These must be received by 11:59 PM Eastern Daylight Time (8:59 PM on the west coast) on October 26th, 2018.

It is crucial to make your voice heard in these matters, but regardless of the outcome librarians should follow the ensuing conclusions of these hearings and public commentary. The ubiquity of US law behooves librarians to educate patrons about these new rules, and reevaluate their institutions' internal privacy policies and data-management workflows. Take advantage of this opportunity to inform legislation that will likely have far-reaching consequences.

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