



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 26, 2007

ACCESS TO INFORMATION REFORMS URGENTLY NEEDED

Victoria—In his annual report released today, Information and Privacy Commissioner David Loukidelis has called on the Premier and Cabinet to show leadership by amending the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* to restore the public's access to information rights that were curtailed by a BC Court of Appeal Decision.

"The bottom line is that the bureaucracy is perfectly content with the Court of Appeal's overly narrow view of public access to information rights under FIPPA. This is unfortunate, since it unnecessarily and inappropriately empowers more information to be hidden from the public than before," the Commissioner stated.

In his annual message, the Commissioner also expressed concern about the impact on privacy of the push for more state intrusion in the name of national security, fighting terrorism and law enforcement. "Unless the state can show, based on real evidence that it has a compelling need to limit our liberty, our business is not the government's business. We have to be careful that in these fear-driven times the risk and contingency that are part of life are not distorted and used to justify greater control in the name of safety", he said. "Of course we need to fight terrorism and of course we need to protect citizens from harm, but we must not hand the state a blank cheque to do whatever it asserts is warranted."

In his report, the Commissioner identified the government's plan to create a network to enable greater sharing of personal information across government programs as a proposal requiring careful scrutiny. "While no one disputes that efficient and effective service delivery warrants appropriate sharing of personal information," the Commissioner acknowledged, "the privacy rights of BC citizens must not be weakened merely to facilitate greater data sharing amongst government officials." In urging the government to build privacy into the design of the system, he noted that "privacy is not an after-market option that can be clamped onto the box once the system is running."

During the last fiscal year, the Commissioner's office received 1,086 formal appeals and complaints under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and the private sector *Personal Information Protection Act*, up from last year's total of 1,059. To deal efficiently with the increasing caseload, the Commissioner implemented a number of procedural and organizational changes, including an early intervention process for simple matters and a fast-tracked system for dealing with "deemed refusals", which involve failures by public bodies to disclose records on time.

The Commissioner's annual report can be found at:

http://www.oipc.bc.ca/publications/annual_reports/2007AR/OIPC_AR_2006_07.pdf

-30-

For further information contact:
Mary Carlson, Executive Director
Phone: 250-387-5629