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PRIVACY COMMISSIONER RELEASES GUIDANCE ON SOCIAL MEDIA BACKGROUND CHECKS

VICTORIA—The Information and Privacy Commissioner of British Columbia issued guidance today to assist organizations and public bodies using social media sites to conduct background checks of prospective employees, volunteers and candidates.

Commissioner Elizabeth Denham cautioned that using social media to conduct background checks presents legal and other challenges.

“We enter a new era with the application of privacy laws to social media background checks,” the Commissioner stated, adding, “the guidelines my Office is issuing today are designed to provide guidance and practical steps to assist organizations and public bodies in complying with the law.”

The guidelines highlight some of the risks associated with performing a social media background check, such as collecting inaccurate information and collecting too much personal information. Commissioner Denham stated that she expected organizations and public bodies to review and adopt the guidelines so that their practices concerning social media background checks comply with privacy obligations.

The use of social media background checks received attention earlier this year when a political party requested the passwords of its potential leadership candidates to permit an examination of their social media sites.

The guidelines and results of the investigation are available on our website at www.oipc.bc.ca under “What’s New”.

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