

October 4, 2023

FIPPA at 30: Commissioner reflects on three decades of BC’s public sector privacy and access to information law

VICTORIA— Thirty years ago today, British Columbia’s *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA) came into force. The landmark legislation, passed with unanimous assent the year prior in the BC Legislature, provided British Columbians with privacy and access to information rights and established the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

Commissioner Michael McEvoy issued the following statement on the 30th anniversary of FIPPA.

“Thirty years ago today, a major accountability gap in our democratic system was addressed with the introduction of BC’s *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. Prior to FIPPA, government whims and political winds could determine what information the public did – and, in many cases, did not – receive. FIPPA changed that. It gave British Columbians a right of access to government information – *their* information – and it put public bodies under a legal obligation to protect the personal information of British Columbians they held. The legislation also established our office – an independent Office of the Legislature tasked with ensuring that the principles of the legislation are put into practice for public bodies of all sizes throughout the province.

The past three decades have shown how powerful FOI and privacy rights can be in holding governments to account. They build trust between public bodies and the people they serve. Access to information contributes directly to a better informed and actively engaged citizenry. All British Columbians, including groups shut out of the halls of power, have a right to this information, to know more about the decisions that public bodies at all levels make that impact their lives. That right is empowering, and it was put into BC law with the introduction of FIPPA.

While we reflect on FIPPA’s impact, it’s important to note that, like any legislation, the statute is not frozen in time – it’s gone through some significant changes and interpretations over the years. Some of these have strengthened British Columbians’ privacy and access rights, while others have weakened them. Throughout, this office has provided public comment, consulted government and championed these rights on behalf of the people we are proud to serve. I can assure British Columbians that as we look forward, my office remains committed to FIPPA’s foundational rights and principles and ready to engage the increasingly complex challenges of the future.”

FIPPA 30th Anniversary Video – Commissioner McEvoy discusses his firsthand experience in the BC Legislature at the time of the passing of FIPPA, the law’s evolution and what it has meant to

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British Columbians over the past 30 years, as well as where he thinks it needs go from here:

<https://youtu.be/mdkZJ19iFdI>

OIPC free in-person training: Throughout the month of October, OIPC staff will be holding in-person training sessions on both FIPPA and the private sector *Personal Information Protection Act* in cities throughout British Columbia. For more information or to register for an event, visit: <https://www.oipc.bc.ca/news-events/events/>

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