



COMMON SENSE, AND SENSIBILITY, AT LAST APPLIED TO PRIVACY OF NGO CLIENT DATA

Media Statement for immediate release - 10 November 2017

The Privacy Foundation warmly welcomes news from Minister of Social Welfare the Hon Carmel Sepuloni that the new government will not be forcing community service providers to release personal details of their clients, as reported today by RNZ. The “data for funding” plans of the former government were to make receipt of government funding conditional on NGOs releasing client details.

The Privacy Foundation asked all parties before the election whether they would discontinue this attempt to force release of data. We are delighted to find Labour, NZ First and the Greens have kept their pre-election commitments to put an end to this troubling proposal.

The Privacy Foundation had no confidence that forced release of data by community service providers in return for government funding was necessary, safe or justified. On the contrary we saw it as risky in practice; unproven in its usefulness; and likely to destroy vulnerable clients’ confidence, making them less likely to seek help. Government systems have a patchy security record and there was no guarantee data would not be leaked, misused or hacked.

We also believed it was unreasonable to put community service provider organisations under pressure to choose between their confidentiality commitments to their clients and receiving government funding.

Social Service Providers Aotearoa have also welcomed the Minister’s announcement and called for a new direction, and a review of current government work on the future uses of data.

Labour told us before the election it believes New Zealand is “lagging behind the rest of the world because of stalled Privacy Act reforms” and that Labour wants “to strengthen consumer protections”.

Protection of individuals and their privacy in the digital environment is increasingly challenging.

We look forward to working with the coalition government in dealing with the task ahead on protecting New Zealanders’ privacy while using valuable data safely.

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