



Opinion

It's time to bring Canada's privacy law into the digital age

Parliamentarians need to advance the proposed Consumer Privacy Protection Act, for the sake of Canadian consumers and the economy they rely on.

BY ALISON SIMPSON

Canada's privacy laws pre-date the digital era. They were created when computers were clunky and before the widespread adoption of smartphones, online shopping, apps, and sophisticated social media platforms.

Canadian consumers and businesses urgently need a new commercial privacy law that ensures modernized protections and consistent rules across the country.

The proposed Consumer Privacy Protection Act (CPPA) that is currently before Parliament in Bill C-27 gives policy-makers the opportunity to protect Canadians through a suite of additional consumer rights, greater transparency and accountability requirements for organizations, and the most substantial financial penalties in the G7.

The CPPA would strengthen privacy protections for consumers and ensure Canadian businesses can leverage data to remain competitive in the global digital economy. And it would do so in a way that's uniquely Canadian. It would preserve Canada's principles-based and technology-neutral approach to privacy law, which has stood the test of time. This would ensure that our law continues to



Innovation Minister François-Philippe Champagne introduced Bill C-27, which would enact the Consumer Privacy Protection Act, in June 2022. It is currently at second reading in the House. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

apply to evolving technologies, business models, and consumer expectations.

It's time for Parliamentarians to advance the CPPA, for the sake of Canadian consumers and the economy they rely on. We need reform now to help ensure Canadians' continued trust in the digital economy. As Philippe Dufresne, Canada's privacy commissioner, stated late last year, "When individuals trust that their rights will be protected, they feel confident about participating freely in the digital economy. This is good for Canadians, good for business, and good for innovation."

Further delays in passing the CPPA would put Canadians and Canadian businesses at risk. A patchwork of privacy rules across several provinces would fill the vacuum, resulting in con-

fusion and complexity for both consumers and businesses.

The digital world is changing quickly. Parliament must act now to ensure that Canadians and organizations are consistently protected in this evolving environment. The bill would introduce world-leading protections while enabling Canadians to enjoy the enormous social and economic benefits of data use.

And it would give the companies fueling our economy the clear, consistent, and practical framework they need to compete effectively. This includes Canada's small- and medium-sized businesses, which represent 98 per cent of all Canadian businesses—the backbone of the Canadian economy. A 2021 survey of more than 1,000 Canadian SMEs illustrates the critical importance of consumer data. The ability to

leverage that data to communicate regularly and in a personalized manner with customers was cited as the primary way SMEs built enough consumer trust and loyalty to weather the pandemic, and to continue to compete against larger online competitors.

Canadians deserve modernized protections and businesses deserve more certainty. We call on all parties to exercise leadership and modernize our commercial privacy law. Canada's success in the digital economy depends on it.

Alison Simpson is the new president and CEO of the Canadian Marketing Association. The CMA represents major brands from all business sectors, small and medium-sized businesses, not-for-profits, public sector organizations and post-secondary institutions from across the country.

The Hill Times