

**Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee Hearing On “Data Brokers – Is Consumers’ Information Secure?”
November 3, 2015**

Today the Judiciary Committee’s Subcommittee on Privacy, Technology and the Law meets to discuss an issue that has the potential to impact nearly every American—the safety and security of the vast amount of personal information that are collected, stored, and sold for profit by data brokers. As corporations reap ever greater profits from personal information about our lives, I believe we must hold them accountable for keeping it safe. I have introduced a bill, the Consumer Privacy Protection Act of 2015, to make sure they do.

The sheer amount of information collected by data brokers is astounding. According to a 2014 report by the Federal Trade Commission, Acxiom, which is one of the largest U.S. data brokers and is here to testify before us today, maintains data on 700 million consumers worldwide, and over 3,000 pieces of information on nearly every U.S. consumer for which it has data. And Acxiom is not alone; this is a growing and largely unregulated industry.

Just as astounding is the type of sensitive information data brokers collect. This includes, but is not limited to, social security numbers, home addresses, phone numbers, online screen names, email addresses, marital status, political affiliation, religious information, online purchase history, web searching history, employment status, arrest records, and even medical information. What is most troubling is that the average American is completely unaware that this information is being compiled and sold to the highest bidder.

As corporations collect more and more private information on consumers, the least we can do is require them to take reasonable measures to keep our sensitive information secure. Time and time again we have seen the devastating effects of data breaches that have affected millions of consumers—Target, Home Depot, Sony, and BlueCross Blue Shield, just to name a few. These breaches put people at risk for identity theft, financial fraud, and violations of privacy. The risk is even greater when the information is deliberately compiled and aggregated to create entire consumer portfolios, as data brokers do. Corporations benefit financially from our consumer data, and they should be obligated to take steps to keep it safe. This is especially true of data brokers whose very business model is to collect and profit from the private details of our lives.

That is why I introduced the Consumer Privacy Protection Act of 2015. This bill would protect consumers by requiring that companies who collect and store consumer information take reasonable measures to keep it secure. The bill would also require that companies notify affected individuals if their sensitive personal or financial information has been breached. Many Americans understandably assume Federal law already protects this sensitive information—common sense tells us that it should. Unfortunately, the reality is that it does not. I hope the Committee will take up this important bill soon. Today’s hearing illustrates why it is imperative that we do so.

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