

California Government Code 6254.21(c) Protects Peace Officers

The information age has created a new officer safety concern for peace officers nationwide. Online data vendors are capitalizing on selling and providing personal information to anyone with a computer and an Internet connection. The availability of this information means that anyone can obtain a peace officer's home address, phone number, social security number, family members' information, voter registration and even a satellite photo of his or her home. This is information that, in the wrong hands, can potentially be threatening to a peace officer and his or her family.

What was once information stored and carefully disseminated from a county clerk's office, court house or government building, has now become easily accessible to the public, the media, criminals, defense attorneys and anyone with a computer. Companies like Lexis Nexis, Choicepoint and Zabasearch offer instant detailed information about you and your family for a fee. While these companies reassure the public that they are secure and exercise security protocols when releasing the information, they are also the first to remind us that the information is public and that public information is just that... information to which the public should have access. However, that is not always the case.

For example, in February 2005, criminals posing as legitimate companies accessed Choicepoint's database causing the company's spokesman James Lee to issue a warning that between 30,000 and 35,000 consumers in California might have had their data accessed by "unauthorized third parties." In November 2005, a disgruntled citizen in New York legally posted the names and home addresses of 79 New York police officers on his website. In 2001, two felons posted thousands of Seattle police and correctional officers' names, home addresses and maps to their homes on an Internet website. Incidents, such as these, have created the necessity for the law to keep current with modern technological advances.

In 2006, California enacted a revised government code, authored by Assemblyman Todd Spitzer, which allows peace officers (active and retired), public safety officers, elected officials, district attorneys and judges the right to demand in writing that their personal information be removed from online databases that sell or provide their information to the public. Peace officers can contact each data vendor's opt-out representative (there are currently more than twenty) and demand that their information be removed from their databases. An even easier way is to log onto www.PolicePrivacy.com and purchase a Privacy Letter Package which contains all of your personalized letters for one small fee.

Accessing information on the Internet has proven to be a useful investigative tool for law enforcement in the information age, but it has also created serious safety concerns for today's police officers and their families.