

Joint Letter to the Government of Alberta on Bringing Political Parties Under PIPA

June 02, 2026

The Honourable Danielle Smith
Premier of Alberta
307 Legislature Building, 10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

The Honourable Mickey Amery
Minister of Justice and Attorney General
424 Legislature Building, 10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

The Honourable Dale Nally
Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction
104 Legislature Building, 10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

cc: Diane McLeod, Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta
cc: Members of the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Re: Bringing political parties under Alberta's Personal Information Protection Act

Dear Premier Smith, Minister Amery, and Minister Nally:

We are writing as a coalition of civil liberties, digital rights, and privacy advocacy organizations to urge your government to amend Alberta's Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA) to cover provincial political parties. The recent leak of personal information belonging to 2.9 million Albertans — nearly the entire provincial electorate — has made the cost of this longstanding legal gap impossible to ignore. Closing it is the single most important step Alberta can take to prevent a repeat.

The Centurion Project leak exposed a gap your government can fix

The facts of the breach are by now well known. The Republican Party of Alberta lawfully received a copy of the List of Electors from Elections Alberta. That list — containing the names, home addresses, phone numbers, and voter registration information of 2.9 million Albertans — then ended up in the hands of the Centurion Project, a third-party advertiser registered to support a separation plebiscite, which posted it as a publicly searchable online database. By the time Elections Alberta secured a court injunction, the data had been accessible online for nearly a month and is, for practical purposes, permanently in the wild.

Information and Privacy Commissioner Diane McLeod has been clear about why she cannot meaningfully respond. As her office stated publicly:

“My office does not have jurisdiction over personal information contained in the List of Electors that may have been disclosed by a political party. This is because the Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA) does not apply to political parties.”

Commissioner McLeod has called this “a concerning gap in Alberta’s privacy laws” and stated bluntly that “it is high time for political parties to be made subject to PIPA.” Her office has been making the same recommendation for decades. The Centurion Project incident is what that gap looks like in practice: a breach affecting nearly every adult in the province, and a privacy regulator with no clear authority to investigate the party at the centre of it.

Why bringing parties under PIPA is the necessary fix

The Election Act includes some controls on the List of Electors, but it is not a privacy law. It does not require parties to safeguard personal information to a defined standard, notify Albertans when their data has been compromised, limit collection to specified purposes, or give individuals the right to see and correct what a party holds about them. PIPA does all of these things — for businesses, charities, and non-profits across the province. Political parties are the conspicuous exception.

Bringing parties under PIPA would deliver, at minimum:

- **Mandatory safeguards.** Parties would be legally required to protect personal information with reasonable security measures, with consequences when they fail to do so.
- **Breach notification.** Albertans would have to be told when their information has been exposed — not learn about it from a journalist or a court filing.
- **Purpose and use limits.** Information collected for electoral purposes could not be quietly handed to third parties for unrelated political projects.
- **Rights of access and correction.** Voters could find out what parties know about them and fix it when it is wrong.
- **Real oversight.** The Information and Privacy Commissioner would have clear jurisdiction to investigate, order remedies, and impose penalties.

None of this is novel or onerous. British Columbia's PIPA has applied to political parties for years without disrupting normal political activity. Comparable democracies including the United Kingdom, the European Union, New Zealand, South Korea, and Brazil all subject political parties to comprehensive privacy laws. What is unusual is the status quo — a situation in which the organizations entrusted with the personal information of every voter in the province operate under weaker rules than a corner store.

Albertans want this fixed

Public support for closing this gap is overwhelming and consistent. A recent Ipsos poll commissioned by OpenMedia, the BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association, and the Canadian Civil Liberties Association found that 80% of Canadians want political parties subject to the same privacy rules as businesses and public sector organizations. Just 10% support the current arrangement in which parties effectively write their own rules. There is no constituency for the status quo outside the parties themselves.

The federal picture does not let Alberta off the hook

We recognize that some of this work properly sits with Parliament. Federal Bill C-25, currently before the House, is intended to address privacy obligations for federal political parties. In its present form, however, it falls well short of genuine reform: it requires only a minimal list of elements that party privacy policies should include, with no binding external review, no purpose limitation, no consent requirement, no rights of access or correction, and no retention limits. We and our partners are pressing for those gaps to be fixed at the federal level.

That work, however, has no bearing on Alberta's jurisdiction over its own provincial parties or its own provincial electors' list. The Centurion Project breach involved a provincially registered party and a provincially issued List of Electors. The privacy law that does not apply to them is provincial. The legislature that can fix it is the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Waiting on Ottawa is neither necessary nor responsive to what Albertans just experienced.

What we are asking

We respectfully urge your government to:

- **Amend PIPA to apply to provincial political parties**, constituency associations, candidates, nomination contestants, and leadership contestants — on the same terms as other organizations covered by the Act.
- **Confirm the Information and Privacy Commissioner's jurisdiction** to investigate, order remedies, and impose administrative penalties on parties for breaches of PIPA.

- **Introduce these amendments in the next sitting of the Legislative Assembly**, rather than deferring action pending the outcome of the RCMP and Elections Alberta investigations into the Centurion Project. Those investigations concern accountability for what already happened; this reform is about preventing the next breach.
- **Consult the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner** on the drafting of the amendments, drawing on its decades of recommendations on this issue and on British Columbia's operating experience under a comparable regime.

Premier Smith has stated that anyone responsible for a breach should be held accountable under the law. We agree. The most direct way to make that meaningful in future cases — and to ensure Albertans are not left, as they are today, watching their privacy commissioner explain that she cannot act — is to bring political parties under the same privacy law that already governs the rest of Alberta's organizations.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with each of your offices to discuss this further, and to share the technical work that civil society and the Commissioner's office have already done on what these amendments could look like.

Sincerely,

Organizational Signatories:

1. OpenMedia
2. Public Interest Alberta (PIA)
3. British Columbia Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA)
4. BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association (BC-FIPA)
5. Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA)
6. International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group

Expert Signatories:

1. Nigel Bankes, Emeritus Professor of Law, The University of Calgary.
2. Maren Aukerman, Associate Professor of Education, The University of Calgary
3. Carla Peck, Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta
4. Kimberly Lenters, Professor, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary
5. Florence Ashley, Assistant Professor of Law, University of Alberta
6. Janet Wesselius, Professor of Philosophy, University of Alberta
7. Margaretta Patrick, Professor, Faculty of Education, The King's University
8. Jonnette Watson Hamilton, Emeritus Professor of Law, University of Calgary
9. Peter W. Sinnema, Professor of English, University of Alberta
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