

## **SNOPA to employers seeking passwords: Access denied**

April 30 2012, by Nancy Owano

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(Phys.org) -- A Bill has been introduced in Washington to stop employers and schools from demanding access to people's social network accounts. On Friday, Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY) presented SNOPA, which stands for the Social Networking Online Protection Act. Under SNOPA, employers can't ask current workers or new job applicants for access to their social networking accounts. If employers ignored the ruling they would pay \$10,000 as civil penalty. The ban on such information demands would also apply to schools.

They would be forbidden to ask for social networking log-in information, to support their decisions on enrollment or discipline. The SNOPA ruling would extend to all school levels, from colleges and universities down to K-12 schools.

The move to introduce the Bill follows reports that employers are asking applicants for information so they can access applicants' Facebook accounts as part of the interview process. Ostensibly the hirers justify this as wanting to see if the person is a team fit and capable of showing the right kind of behavior within the job's professional setting. Demands are also placed on present employees. A case in point involved a teacher's aide in Michigan who was fired after she refused to hand over her Facebook password to supervisors. Their demand had followed a complaint by a parent on the aide's Friend list who found a photo objectionable.

Those backing the legislation say it's a disturbing trend. Engel said there were "countless examples" of employers requiring an applicant to divulge user name and password as part of the hiring process. "A person's so-called 'digital footprint' is largely unprotected," he said in a statement.

Such infringements, say SNOA backers, also infringe on other protective shields. Viewing a [social networking](#) site may reveal applicant information that is not allowed to be up for consideration at the time of the interview, such as religion or sexual orientation.

Facebook would welcome such a bill. Facebook has called attention to a "distressing increase" in password-demand cases in the United States over the past few years. While there is no federal law yet to remedy the issue, a number of voices on the state level have expressed dissent over coerced access. Maryland is in the front lines seeking to ban the practice.

As an example of concern, the Maryland Department of Corrections was requiring access to applicants' Facebook pages to view profiles, as part of screening those seeking work in jails, and looking for possible illegal activity and gang affiliations. One such instance involved a former corrections officer wanting to be recertified for his job following a leave

of absence. He complied, as an interviewer roamed his private messages, pictures, and posts.

The Department, however, has revised its policy and asks only for voluntary participation to view profiles. According to an AP report, the corrections department last year assessed 2,689 applications. Out of the 2,689, seven candidates were rejected in part because of information found on their social media profiles. Another candidate was rejected solely because of content on a profile. That candidate, along with others, used social media profiles that had images of them showing gang signs.

A bill that would protect against bosses viewing employee passwords awaits signature by the Maryland governor.

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