



Oregon Public Broadcasting
7140 SW Macadam Avenue Portland, OR 97219
503.244.9900 opb.org

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Chair Kron, members of the Oregon Sunshine Committee,

My name is Tony Schick. For the past five years, I've been an investigative and data journalist with Oregon Public Broadcasting, primarily covering the environment and natural resources. Before that, I worked with Investigative Reporters and Editors, or IRE, a nonprofit that trains journalists to use investigative reporting methods, particularly public documents and data.

Thank you for considering this issue. I've listened to your previous discussions of this and appreciate your thoughtful approach.

For your consideration, I'm here to provide testimony about how personal contact info and other categories of personal information, such as date of birth, driver's license numbers and government identification numbers have been not only useful but also essential to my pursuits of journalism in the public interest.

I'll start with a few examples regarding personal contact information such as address, telephone number, and email address. On the environment beat, this information central to finding and vetting public complaints about pollution.

In 2014, I obtained case files from the Oregon Department of Agriculture that included the names and contact information for people who reported they had been exposed to herbicides from a helicopter spraying nearby timberlands, as well as the helicopter company and timber company. Using this information I was able to contact and interview the people involved.

The resulting investigation of Oregon's pesticide oversight and response prompted the state Legislature to take up the issue.

In such cases address information, in particular, allowed me to test the veracity of claims and the efficacy of state law. Take, for instance, a story I did about a pesticide application in 2015. Oregon law requires a no-spraying buffer of 60 feet around fish-bearing streams. Using the locations of the herbicide application and the locations of complaints and state sampling, I determined that an herbicide considered toxic to fish had in fact drifted 250 feet past its target and generated another complaint from 1,000 feet farther.



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In 2016, I worked with an OPB colleague to investigate the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality's response to air quality complaints. Personal information in complaint data we received from DEQ enabled us to contact people who had voiced concerns about bad air in their neighborhood and claimed the state had done little to follow up on the situation. The personal information was also necessary for an analysis we conducted showing facilities with a history of complaints that never resulted in investigative or enforcement action on the part of the agency. Certain neighbors filed multiple complaints, sometimes from separate email addresses. Sometimes separate family members would each file complaints on the same day from the same address. Because of this, personal information such as name, address, phone number or email proved necessary in determining how many unconnected clean air complaints a business had received.

Last year, I used contact information on applications for Oregon's wolf compensation program, obtained via public records law, to contact ranchers for an investigation into questionable payments made via this program. The ranchers I interviewed as a result were central to the published story.

In my time as a reporter, I've found very few people to be upset when I contact them based on this information. I am up front about how I obtained their information and why I am contacting them. If anyone does not wish to talk to me, I respect that and end the conversation.

Date of Birth

At OPB, reporters are frequently doing routine backgrounding of our sources and names that appear in public records and the news. Often it's the only way to find the sources we need for our stories. When I worked at the journalism non-profit Investigative Reporters and Editors, we preached the importance of running background checks on all primary sources in a story, no matter how benign the subject matter might seem.

Date of birth is often an essential piece of information for this task. Without it, finding the right person can be very difficult. Just last month, I used a name and address from a public record to track down a phone number for someone I hoped to interview. But I didn't have his date of birth, and the phone number I found turned out to be for the man's father, who had the same name.

Public Employer-Issued Identification

In 2015, I used timesheet data from the Oregon State Police for an investigation into the state's efforts to combat poaching and other wildlife crimes. I had heard that in rural counties where local law enforcement ranks had thinned, Fish and Wildlife troopers were increasingly bearing the burden, meaning they had less time to combat the growing problem of poaching. Using employee identifiers in that data, I was able to calculate the percent of time Oregon's Fish and



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Wildlife troopers were spending on unrelated work such as drug enforcement, burglaries and domestic violence. Without those identification numbers, I would have been unable to analyze the data properly, as I would have had no way of knowing whether I had double counted one officer's time or counted two officers with the same last name as different people.

A year later, I used employee identifiers when researching whether the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife had used federal funds meant for conservation on the lethal control of wolves. Determined whether this happened required tracing which employees charged what time to what account – this required matching employee identifiers across separate documents.

Driver's License Numbers

In June of this year, two of my colleagues at Oregon Public Broadcasting published a story about how the state failed to warn parents that a particular Portland daycare was considered a danger to children.

Using the daycare provider's driver's license number obtained through public records, they were able to very pieces of the daycare provider's history and work record they would have been unable to otherwise.

With that I conclude my testimony to the committee and am happy to answer any questions.