

MARYLAND BANS EMPLOYERS FROM ASKING FOR FACEBOOK LOGIN

The Facebook logo, consisting of the word "facebook" in white lowercase letters on a blue square background.

In the first ruling of its kind in the United States, Maryland's General Assembly passed a bill prohibiting employers from demanding employee user names and passwords to Facebook and other social networks. Workers and job-seekers now have the legal right to refuse employer requests for the usernames and passwords needed to access personal pages on Facebook and other social media sites. Refusal to hire or to take disciplinary action in such a situation would also constitute a violation of the bill which now has to be signed into law by Gov. Martin O'Malley. Growing concerns about employers seeking access to the social media pages of employees and job-seekers would make the bill, if signed by the governor, the first social media privacy protection law in the U.S. According to Melissa Goemann, who directs the American Civil Liberties Union's legislative efforts in Maryland, this is a really positive development since social media technology is expanding every year. "This sets a really good precedent for limiting how much your privacy can be exposed when you use these mediums". The ACLU took up the case of Maryland Corrections Officer Robert Collins, who had been asked to provide his Facebook login and password to Corrections officials during a recertification interview. Collins who appeared on "All Things Considered" last month, after he was asked for his user name and password says, "...I was asking him what he was looking for and what he was doing.....he said he was going through my messages, my wall, my friends list and my pictures to make sure that I was not gang-affiliated. I felt violated, disrespected, and that not only my privacy but the privacy of my family and friends was invaded." Sens. Chuck Schumer and Richard Blumenthal say they asked the U.S. Justice Department to investigate whether the practice is illegal, even as news of similar cases came to light. Other labor law experts have also struck a similar note saying that that while many employers may be seeking merely "job-related information," they're also "playing with fire." Illinois and other states are also close to enacting legislation banning the interview practice, while Facebook has also expressed its disapproval, releasing a statement titled "Protecting Your Passwords and Your Privacy". In the "All Things Considered" interview, Collins said, "I mean, it's no different than me saying OK, I want to come into your home and install cameras, to see what you're doing on an everyday basis. It's just unreasonable."

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