Beat: Local

AIRBNB POLICY TO RELEASE ANONYMIZED DATA ABOUT ITS USERS

IN A LETTER TO CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS

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USPA NEWS - Airbnb's release of anonymized data about people who use its site to rent their property 'will give New York City the necessary information to craft needed regulations and to enforce them' while still protecting privacy, Consumer Watchdog said last tuesday...

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The nonprofit, nonpartisan public interest group stated its position in a letter to City Council Members Helen Rosenthal and Jumaane Williams, who had written an opinion piece for the New York Daily News calling for Airbnb to turn over detailed personal information including names, addresses and IP addresses of people using the home-sharing platform to rent their property.

Consumer Watchdog said Airbnb's plan to release anonymized data will give important insight into such matters as the number and type of units offered, the rent charged, the number of nights offered and the number of listings per host. From the anonymized data city officials and regulators should be able to gain an understanding of how Airbnb works in New York. Importantly, regulators should be able to identify those anonymized records showing indications of possible violations of city code.

The letter expressed concern about the Council Members' proposed massive data collection without the safeguard of a warrant or subpoena.

John M. Simpson wrote:

"The legitimacy of sweeping government demands for consumers' personal data is one of the central privacy questions of our time. Requiring citizens to give up their right to privacy so enforcement officials can scour through records and search for potential violations of local laws amounts to a blank search warrant.

'Americans balk at this kind of mass data collection when the government does it in the name of preventing terrorism. Why would it be acceptable when the government's aim is to catch homeowners violating zoning codes or skimping on their taxes ?

'Government requests for personally identifiable data must carefully balance the right to privacy against the right to safety and security for the public.

Judges typically need to issue warrants for such information because it is considered each citizen's right to protect it. Throwing open the door to mass data collection of the most personal of information “ with no legal justification like a warrant or subpoena “ would deal a serious blow to privacy rights in New York.'

Source : Consumer Watchdog

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