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B.C.'s PRIVACY COMMISSIONER WELCOMES GOVERNMENT'S COSTCO DECISION

Victoria—Information and Privacy Commissioner David Loukidelis today responded favourably to the provincial government's decision to abandon its attempt to compel Costco to reveal its customers' personal information. "I welcome Minister Thorpe's decision," the commissioner stated.

"Tax revenues are important, but so is privacy," Loukidelis said, adding, "I believe the ministry was trying to use its powers in a privacy-invasive way. It was casting a wide net for detailed personal information of citizens who hadn't given government any reason to suspect them individually." Loukidelis added, "I hope the minister's decision signals an end to such surveillance-like use of government's powers."

The Ministry of Small Business and Revenue had demanded that Costco produce details of purchases at its Alberta stores by British Columbia residents, seeking details going back several years, a demand that Costco has challenged in court.

Loukidelis wrote to the ministry twice in recent weeks, stating his concerns about the harm to citizens' privacy of forcing businesses like Costco to share confidential information about ordinary citizens who have not given the government any reason to suspect them individually of doing anything illegal.

Loukidelis today added that, "In recent years, we've seen more and more laws that force businesses to spy on their customers for governments without a warrant or even individual grounds for suspicion. This trend is deeply disturbing and should be stopped."

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