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## PTA Privacy Policy and Appropriate Use of PTA Contact Information

As we use technology more and more, we get some interesting offers via email. One we received is from a company who will help get the vote out for school budgets. We are quite sure there is a cost involved, but we are looking into this as it relates to our privacy policy, so we can provide appropriate guidance to the field.

In light of this, it occurred to me that this is a good time to remind all our members that PTA has a strict privacy policy regarding the appropriate use of contact information of officers and members gathered by any PTA. This contact information is for PTA official use only and may never be shared with anyone else... not your school district, not your teachers' union, not other elected officials, other community groups, or really, even other members within the PTA if their purpose for having it is not within the scope of their PTA duties.

Believe it or not about four years ago NYS PTA was sued over this. This was costly to our association, but thankfully we prevailed as we take safeguarding the information collected very seriously.

So exactly what does this mean to all of you? Once a PTA at any level gathers contact information, it may only be used to contact members for official PTA business or purposes. It is the President in conjunction with the Executive Committee (generally the elected officers) who determines what that is. A member with access to this information may never use it to send other information to members simply because they have the contact information, or simply because they think the topic might be somehow related to PTA or one's schools.

In this electronic age, it is imperative that an email group be built where none of the recipients of the email can see who the others are. Often emails are shared by forwarding without taking the time to remove headers; a blind listserv is the only way to preserve the privacy of our membership.

That being said, what about when a school district includes PTA President information in a school district directory? In the case of the school district or any other entity, as long as the person freely provides the information knowing where it will be published, there is no violation of our privacy policy.

What about PTAs who produce a directory of its membership's contact information for others? When soliciting for a directory, it must be clear what the purpose is so that people understand their personal information will be shared. What should never happen is having a membership drive and simply putting together a directory without a member having the option to opt out of inclusion in the directory. Therefore, we advise for the protection of the association, that there be a sign-up sheet with a box to check to opt in to being part of the directory. We do not advise an opt-out in this case since people sometimes overlook it. Frankly, because we all have children, we ask that PTAs seriously consider if this is a good idea to produce in a world that has increased risks.

We never provide exhibitors at a conference with a list of the attendees. The only way they can gather contact information is when you visit their booth and provide it.

Finally, the NYS and National PTA, as the parent associations under which you were chartered, has the right to have this information, and may, at some point, begin to request it for purposes of directly reaching more of our members with information (some State Congresses already do). However, there is one agency that can REQUIRE you to provide a list of your members to them, not necessarily contact information, but a complete list. That agency is the IRS; they require every PTA to maintain a record of its membership and would have the right to request it at any time.

We hope you find this latest installment of information helpful.

Susan Lipman  
NYS PTA President