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Facebook's message to employers to back off from hijacking workers' privacy is timely: unions

Moves by the social networking site Facebook to prevent employers from intruding on workers' privacy by forcing them to hand over access to their personal information should be commended, say unions.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said employers seeking access to their current or prospective employees' personal Facebook sites was an excessive breach of individuals' privacy and their rights.

"Unions have been increasingly concerned about moves by employers to delve into their employees' personal lives so we are pleased that Facebook has taken affirmative action to send a message that this is not okay," Ms Kearney said.

"Facebook and other social media sites allow people to keep in touch, express themselves freely and to share information - but they have a right to choose who they share this with.

"Employees are entitled to have a life outside of work and away from their boss and they have a right to control who sees their personal information. There is little difference between forced access to someone else's Facebook site and intruding on their home.

"If an employee is not performing their duties correctly, or does not seem the right applicant for the job, then employers have existing ways to deal with this and do not need to take excessive and over-the-top measures simply because technology has advanced."

Ms Kearney said stories of employers seeking access to workers' Facebook accounts were deeply concerning and they needed to be stopped before it got out of control.

"This amounts to nothing less than employers attempting to further tip the power balance against workers," she said. "Everyone has a right to privacy, at work and especially away from work."

Facebook's chief privacy officer has issued a statement outlining its opposition to employers having access to private accounts, and indicating it will take action against alleged breaches of its policies.

Ms Kearney said workers should nevertheless be careful about what they put on social networking sites, and who they shared information and views with.

She said there had been several cases in Australia where workers had lost their jobs because of views of their employers that had been published on sites like Facebook.

"You do need to be cautious about what you say, but at the same time, demands by employers that they have access to people's personal sites is beyond the pale," Ms Kearney said.

She said any workers who had concerns that their privacy had been breached by their employer can contact the Unions Australia helpline on 1300 4 UNION (1300 4 86466) or

www.unionsaustralia.com.au

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