

## **‘Worst Nightmare’: In Wake of Tragedy, Salas Calls for Efforts to Safeguard Online Privacy of Federal Judges**

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Scott S. Christie

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Two weeks after the shooting death of her son by an attorney who came to her door with a gun, U.S. District Judge Esther Salas of the District of New Jersey has called for a “national dialogue” on safeguarding the privacy of federal judges.

In the U.S., a few states, including New Jersey, Massachusetts and California, have enacted aggressive data privacy laws, said Scott Christie of McCarter & English in Newark, who litigates in the areas of information technology and data privacy. The patchwork of varying state laws is hard for companies to comply with, and enforcement of state laws can be problematic, he said. There has been little movement for a federal law on the subject, although the death of Salas’ son could stir interest in Congress, Christie said.

“The real answer is to do this on the federal level so you have a common standard, and you can enforce it and it’s fairly transparent. Unfortunately we haven’t been able to get a federal data privacy law passed,” he said.

Despite the difficulty, “limiting the ability to publicly access personal information online is a laudable cause,” Christie said. He suggests judges who are concerned about online privacy should avoid having a personal presence on sites like Facebook and Instagram. “The goal is not to give people who are searching for you online any kernel of personal information they might use to get more information,” Christie said.

“It’s extraordinarily difficult dealing with these issues because of the ease of getting personal information on people these days,” Christie said. “If [the information they seek] is not online, they can hire a private investigator. If people are motivated enough and are willing to spend the time and energy and money, they are going to find out where you live.”