



AD: Podcasting monthly from the shores of the Delaware River in Trenton, New Jersey, this is Tech NJ, powered by NJOIT - the New Jersey office of Information Technology.

CP: Welcome to the TechNJ podcast. I'm your host, Craig Parker, and today we're going to be interviewing and introducing the new leadership that will be shaping innovation and technology at NJOIT and for the State of New Jersey. We're going to be talking to the COO and Chief Data and Privacy Officer, Carrie Parikh.

CSP: Hi Craig! Thank you for having me, and thank you to the folks out there who are listening.

CP: Can you share a little bit about what it is that you do, and your title and field?

CSP: Sure! So I have two titles here at OIT. The first, in no particular order, is Chief Operating Officer. As COO, I oversee the ongoing business operations here within OIT. Some of my duties are overseeing the day-to-day, keeping our CTO apprised of significant events, creating operation strategy and policies, communicating those strategies and policies to employees, and fostering employee alignment with OIT's goals. It sounds like a lot, but to sum it up, I like to think of my job as this - I'm here to ensure that every employee at OIT has what he or she needs to do their job and do it well. The employees do not serve me, I serve them so together we can serve the residents of the State of New Jersey. My other title is Chief Data and Privacy Officer. This is the title I affectionately refer to as privacy geek or privacy nerd. In this role, I'm charged with developing and implementing policies designed to protect all of New Jersey residents data from unauthorized use and access.

CP: How does your background prepare you for all of the challenges of this job, and how will it help serve the State of New Jersey?

CSP: I think being a lawyer gives me sort of the strength and fortitude and problem-solving skills that are needed for this position. I think being a privacy professional situates me quite well to handle the privacy issues - that's truly what I do. And I think (laughs) doing all of this while being a full-time mom helps me manage all the rest. You know, working moms are sometimes uniquely positioned to juggle not just all the balls in the air, but the swords and fire sticks too, and oftentimes I feel like it's a dangerous thing because I'm doing all of that, juggling, while on a unicycle, while on a tightrope, so I don't think that we can discount being a mom as an important skill in these types of positions.

CP: Being a mom is very important, and I'm glad I had a strong one growing up, and I'm glad my wife is a strong mom to my kids so I understand...

CSP: Yeah, I hear that, and you know, I'm raising a daughter and a son, and I will say that it's important for both of them to see strong, independent women lead in fields that are typically not populated by a lot of women.

CP: How does it feel to be the first State of New Jersey privacy officer? Not many states even have this position.

CSP: Yeah - you know what? You're right. At my last count, and it could be off by 1 or 2, but at my last count, there are six state-wide privacy positions in the United States. That would make New Jersey 7, so lucky number 7 if you will, and I do feel lucky. I'm a lawyer by education, with a specialization in privacy. Privacy and the law are things that I'm passionate about, and I take very seriously. I'm also passionate about public service, so now I get to take those passions and bring them together to serve the great people of New Jersey. So, for quite a few years in the private space, there's better focus on protecting people's information. I think that we've all seen letters come through in the mail from Home Depot, Target, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and we know that the private space has been very keen to treat our data well. There are tons of laws advising companies on what they can and cannot do to collect data, how they can use data, what they must do to protect the data that they have, and it doesn't feel good when we get those letters in the mail if we have no idea who's looking out for you. It's obviously very important that whoever we give our information to protects it, but in the private space, we have lots of choices, right? We can choose to shop at Store A or Store B, or bank with Bank X or Bank Y. The same is not true for citizens or residents of a state. If you currently live here, or you lived here in the past, you have to have provided a ton of your personal information in order to just make the government work for you. So to me, the onus on public entities to create its consumers, its residents if you will, their privacy rights is far, far more important than in the private space and far more critical. Public entities are also at a greater risk for the bad guys. So really, it's the perfect storm - we have all your data, we have to have all of your data, and bad guys want it. So, this is why I think we're going to see an increase in privacy rules in public entities, and at least here in New Jersey, now you know who is on the front lines protecting you and your privacy rights.

CP: How did you start out in technology? Did you always know you wanted to pursue this as a field?

CSP: I went to law school to become a litigator, and I did that... we'll stay for a long time. Several years back, I received a call from a recruiter who asked me if I would be interested in a position that focuses on privacy and information security, and I will say at first I thought it was kind of a joke or somebody was pulling a prank on me because I was a litigator with zero experience in the field. But the person hiring, another superwoman in tech, was looking for

someone with the skills that I did have because she thought with a bit of training and mentoring, I'd excel in the area. She's very much a woman who wants to build up other women in the industry, and I owe a lot of my tech career to her, and give her incredible kudos for where I am today. Anyway, on a leap of faith, I left the traditional legal world and took on a career and privacy in information security. It wasn't easy, it was a big risk, there was a lot to learn and I had to do it fast, but the flip side is it's been the most incredible experience of my life. I had finally found something that I loved and am passionate about. Because of that, learning it got easier and easier. Eventually, it became second nature, although there's always something to learn in this space and in every space quite frankly. I eventually left that position and went back to the legal world. I was in house at a large hospitality chain, where I was eventually promoted to be responsible for the global data and privacy program and IT procurement. So, technology just keeps following me, and I it.

CP: What is the most exciting part of your new position here at NJOIT?

CSP: Well, I certainly love a challenge, and the great thing about privacy Law & policy that surrounds it is that it's still so new and it's always changing. Every time there's a new technology that touches data, there's a new challenge. I also love that I got to learn about technology. It might come as a surprise to a lot of people, but I actually didn't start in the tech field, and I would certainly be hesitant to say that I'm a tech expert, meaning I'm not coding, I'm not developing software, I'm not the person with my fingers on the keyboards making sweeping sort of tech changes. If you ask my husband, he will tell you that sometimes I can't even get the DVD to function correctly, so I'm definitely no tech guru. But in order to understand and protect people's privacy, I have to understand security, right? Tech security. And a huge component of technology security, information security, is the technology piece. So through my career privacy, I've had to learn a great bit about technology.

CP: You are in charge of a lot - Privacy officer, Data Officer, and I heard you're an expert at accessibility issues...

CSP: So, let's level set for a second - When we're talking about accessibility in this context, we're talking about the American with Disabilities Act, and their rules regarding website accessibility, and there's a whole lot of standards and guidelines out there on what it means for a website to be accessible, and I won't bore any of our listeners with the details. But I will say this, and I'm not going to disrespect any accessibility experts by calling myself an expert, as part of my career in the private sector, I worked to ensure that everyone has equal access to digital services. It's something I became passionate about. So I decided to learn what I could, and apply it as I could. To do that, I had to dive into digital accessibility standards and the technology associate with that. I had to partner with the real experts, and there's a lot of great real experts in the industry, and together we worked to make digital sites accessible for everyone. I hope that those skills will be able to transition into this position, and then I can help to work to ensure that every resident of the State of New Jersey has not only equal access to, but ease of access to all of our digital services. It's a top goal of mine, and I know of OIT.

People who have certain disabilities, perhaps visual impairments or hearing impairments, can't look at a screen that displays a digital website in the same way that a person that does not have those disabilities has, so we need to ensure that the folks with hearing or vision impairments have the same exact access to, and ability to use the services on those websites. So perhaps that means changing the colors, changing the font, adding smart technology, adding hearing technology, adding searchability functions through keyboard rather than mouse. There's a lot of software out there that allows a person with a disability to interact with digital sites. We want to ensure that our sites line up with that technology, so that if you were sitting at your screen, you are sitting there with the same equal ease-of-access as every other person.

CP: So you just accepted the position and you've only been here a month - what do you look in the focus on in the coming months?

CSP: We already discussed the ADA website accessibility, that for sure is top-of-mind and extraordinarily important. I'd also like to focus on the policies for collecting and using New Jersey residents and citizens data. I think it's crucial that we have significant transparency with everyone in the state of New Jersey as to what we're collecting, why we're collecting it, how we're using it, and how we're storing it and protecting it, and I think that there's some opportunities there for New Jersey to do better and be better. Through technology, I think we can streamline all of our interactions with the state. Imagine a day, where via a single website, one website or an app, you can conduct all of your critical state business. Let's say you can get your driver's license renewed, you can pay your taxes, you can get a fishing license, and maybe you can actually log in and get a ton of information about tourist stuff... book a campsite. The Governor's transition report for OIT lays out some incredible initiatives, and I have high hopes that all of them will come to fruition. It certainly helps we have a Governor who care so much about innovation and modernization. He's the biggest champion for improving the lives in New Jersey resident, and he knows that a great way to do that is through the use of Technology.

CP: What do you protect for the future of Citizen engagement and participating with their government?

CSP: Yeah, I mean, I think all you have to do is look at the transition reports that came out of the Governor's Office when the transition was happening, and you can see that this Administration is or at least wants to be finely tuned in to what the citizens and residents of the State of New Jersey are after. This is not an Administration that's leading for the sake of leading - they're leading to the people, for the people, and by the people. Look - New Jersey's a great state with a lot of amazing things already happening from the technology perspective, but I do think that we have room to improve access to government. We can make it easier, faster and more tailored to the needs of New Jersey residents and OIT and Technology are I think in the number one spot in ensuring that something like that happens.

CP: Thank you for taking time out of your busy day to speak to us about all the exciting projects and ideas that are coming to the people of New Jersey. I'm looking forward to speaking with you again soon.

CSP: Yeah - thank you for having me today. I look forward to many more opportunities to speak to, but more importantly, hear from and listen to the great folks in New Jersey.

CP: Don't miss our upcoming episode focusing on Women in Tech. Email us at Podcast@tech.nj.gov. Check out OIT's website at tech.nj.gov and follow us on Twitter [@NJOIT](https://twitter.com/NJOIT). I'm Craig Parker, have a great day.