

NEWS RELEASE

From the Office of the Indiana Attorney General

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Indiana Attorney General Steve Carter Launches Identity Theft Unit Over Increasing Concern of Electronic Data Security Breaches & Increasing Complaints of Identity Theft

March 2-8 is the 10th Annual National Consumer Protection Week

(INDIANAPOLIS, IN) – Indiana Attorney General Steve Carter has created an Identity Theft Unit to further assist identity theft victims and to provide additional resources to local law enforcement authorities that investigate and prosecute the crime. The Unit is prepared to assist victims as we recognize 10th Annual National Consumer Protection Week (NCPW) March 2 – 8. Security breaches and increased consumer complaints highlight the need for a specialized unit Carter announced today. In 2007, there were 328 security breaches nationwide in the private sector (source: Privacy Right's Clearinghouse), nearly one per day. At least 23 of those breaches involved personal information of Indiana residents.

"Our new unit is designed to reduce the frustration felt by victims and to provide expertise and resources to local law enforcement authorities in investigating and prosecuting this crime," Carter said. "We work with entities regularly on compliance with Indiana's security breach notification law. We want to ensure that citizens have been properly notified when their personal information has been jeopardized and left unsecured for identity thieves to access. When information gets into the wrong hands, it may cause havoc in the lives of victims who then find themselves in a vicious cycle of trying to prove who they are to federal, state and local authorities time and time again."

The ID Theft Unit is a part of the Consumer Protection Division of the Attorney General's Office and is staffed by a team of attorneys, investigators, and support staff. The Unit will actively investigate the alleged fraud and provide hands-on assistance to consumers to help them address and correct the problems caused by the identity theft. The Unit will offer assistance, expertise and resources to local law enforcement and prosecutors in any criminal prosecution efforts that may result.

The Unit will also advocate educational efforts which will be assisted by J. Michelle Sybesma, an identity theft survivor and creator of GetIDSmart.com, a website designed to educate the public on protecting personal information from thieves. Sybesma knows all too well the problems caused by an identity theft and is an advocate of protecting personal information.

"Once upon a time, I carried an affidavit from the United States Postal Service verifying I was indeed who I professed to be," Sybesma notes. "I was led on a long, frustrating journey over 10 years ago to restore my identity. The attorney general is in a unique position to raise awareness and provide necessary assistance to those who find themselves in this unfortunate circumstance. I applaud the attorney general and his efforts to impact and help identity theft victims in Indiana."

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Carter and Sybesma agree that there are some basic steps to follow immediately if a person believes he/she has been a victim of identity theft:

- Report the crime to your local law enforcement agency and file a consumer complaint with the Attorney General's Office.
- Place fraud alerts or credit freezes with the three major credit reporting agencies.
- Contact your banks and other financial institutions to ensure your accounts are secure and they are aware of the fraud against you.
- Get organized -Create a folder or binder in which to keep all correspondences, fax receipts, certified mail receipts, etc.
- Log the results of all calls/conversations with Dates, Times, Names and a call back number of the contact who assisted you. It is easy to mistakenly assume you will remember everything and often underestimate the amount of activity that takes place to repair this damage.
- Depending on where the fraud took place, your course of action may vary slightly.

Indiana's Security Breach Notification Law took effect July 1, 2006 [IC 24-4.9] which requires companies and individuals who hold personal information in an electronic format to notify those people affected if the data has been left unsecured and available for unauthorized access. There have been at least 23 private sector breaches reported to the attorney general's office since this law took effect.

"People can be taken completely off guard by security breaches that may result in identity theft," Carter added. "We are in the unique position of providing helpful support and guidance along with important investigative assistance when necessary. This Unit is one more helpful tool in our growing consumer resources."

The Identity Theft Kit and information on how to contact the ID Theft Unit can be found at www.IndianaConsumer.com.