



Ohio Senate
Statehouse
Columbus, Ohio 43215

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**REPUBLICANS & DEMOCRATS UNITE TO PASS INCREASED PROTECTIONS AGAINST IDENTITY
THEFT AS SENATE COMMITTEE BEGINS HEARINGS ON COMPREHENSIVE PROPOSAL**

*Legislation sponsored by Senator Tom Niehaus earns support of
Attorney General Dann & Treasurer Cordray;
Similar proposals introduced by Senator Boccieri & State Representatives J. Stewart and DeGeeter*

COLUMBUS – Today as the Senate Civil Justice Committee begins hearings on Senate Bill 6 -- a comprehensive proposal to increase protections against identity theft -- a group of legislators and statewide leaders on both sides of the aisle joined together to push for changes to Ohio law that will better protect Ohio consumers.

State Senator Tom Niehaus (R-New Richmond) has introduced Senate Bill 6, which seeks to give consumers more control over their own personal information so they can prevent their information from being compromised and would give law enforcement more tools to prosecute when identity theft crimes do occur. Similar proposals to combat identity theft have been introduced by State Senator John Boccieri (D-New Middletown) and State Representatives Jimmy Stewart (R-Athens) Timothy DeGeeter (D-Parma).

“While the General Assembly has been very proactive in passing strong laws to punish those that engage in identity theft and to help victims recover from identity theft, there is more work to be done,” Niehaus said. “Consumers need additional tools so that protections are in place before identity theft can even occur. In addition, we must make sure public offices are more sensitive to the risks of releasing consumers’ personal information, like Social Security numbers, and that law enforcement personnel have the training and resources to combat this growing crime.”

Niehaus’ comprehensive approach has earned the endorsement of two key state leaders – State Treasurer Richard Cordray and Attorney General Marc Dann.

"Identity theft is estimated to cost U.S. businesses \$48 billion per year. That is a great deal of wasted money, and it not only wreaks havoc with individual lives, but it also causes great harm to our larger economy," Treasurer Cordray said. "We must face the inevitable fact that accidental exposure or the unintentional sharing of our personal financial information which we've seen within the past year is likely to continue, as much as we might hope otherwise. The key is to create a framework within which people will be put in a better position to protect themselves, rather than relying on the promises of others."

"This legislation is critically important because it clearly establishes that people--not credit card companies, not banks, and not the credit bureaus--own their credit and have the right to control it," Attorney General Dann said.

(more)

One key component of Niehaus' bill -- allowing consumers to place a security freeze on their credit reports when they believe their personal information has been compromised -- is a piece on which Senator Bocchieri and State Representatives Stewart and DeGeeter have all been working to address through their own legislative initiatives.

"With identity theft on the rise, it's important that government at all levels offer tools to help citizens protect their identity, their financial standing and their credit," Bocchieri said. "Using developing technology, I believe consumers should be able to freeze and thaw their credit instantaneously."

"Representative DeGeeter and I have introduced House Bill 46 as a bi-partisan effort to allow consumers a more proactive approach when it comes to protecting their credit. Giving the citizens of Ohio the opportunity to protect their credit is of paramount importance," Stewart said.

"Identity theft is a growing burden on Ohio's consumers. I have constituents who have spent thousands of dollars to restore their credit - to say nothing of the time spent trying to clear their name," DeGeeter said. "We need to help people protect themselves before they become a victim. This bill offers a proactive approach to stopping identity theft."

Under SB 6, the credit freeze could only be lifted by the individual themselves and, to ensure credit agencies are abiding by the regulations, the state Attorney General would be charged with enforcement of these consumer protections.

Had the security freeze been in place, consumer Monroe Peeler, a retiree from Mayfield Heights, Ohio, believes he could have saved four years and thousands of dollars in legal and other expenses. While doing a routine check of his own credit report, Peeler discovered that someone had opened an account in his name. He supports the leaders' efforts to combat identity theft and hopes to be among the first to apply for a security freeze should the bill pass so that he can ensure his personal information is no longer in jeopardy.

In addition to the security freeze provision, SB 6 proposes new safeguards to protect information held by businesses and government agencies. Public officials would be required to remove Social Security numbers and other personal identifying information when providing inspection or copies of public records in response to public records requests or when making records available on the Internet. In cases where consumers do fall victim to identity theft, SB 6 would also expand the timeframes both for which identity thieves can be criminally prosecuted and for consumers to recover any damages through civil actions. The proposal would also give law enforcement better tools and funding support by establishing grants through the Office of Criminal Justice Services that would help them update their computer technology or provide for additional staff training.

Senator Niehaus and other legislators are conducting meetings with interested parties and continuing work on the details of the bill. The leaders are hopeful that the broad, bipartisan support to expand consumer protections for all Ohioans will keep this issue on the front-burner in the General Assembly.