

A MESSAGE FROM
ILLINOIS ATTORNEY GENERAL

Lisa Madigan



Identity theft can wreak havoc on your credit history as well as your peace of mind. While taking immediate action can help to limit the harm to your finances, repairing the damage done by identity thieves can be a long and arduous process.

To help you as you work to clear your name and credit history, I created the Identity Theft Hotline, 1-866-999-5630 (TTY: 1-877-844-5461). Experienced staff in my office are standing by to assist victims of identity theft with problems ranging from difficulty obtaining a police report to issues with creditors.

If you are a victim of identity theft, I urge you to call the Identity Theft Hotline to take advantage of this assistance. Help is only a phone call away.

Sincerely,

Lisa Madigan
Attorney General

Tips to Guard Against Identity Theft

- Don't give out your social security number unless it is necessary—and don't carry your card in your wallet.
- Carry only the ID and credit cards you need.
- Don't give personal information over the phone unless you initiated the call.
- Don't transmit personal information over the internet unless it is a secure site, and don't reveal personal information in emails or discussion forums.
- Mail outgoing bills at the post office; don't put them in your home mailbox.
- Empty your mailbox as soon as possible.
- Shred documents containing personal information before discarding.
- Know when your account statements are mailed, and report discrepancies and late or missing statements.
- **Order your credit report every year from the three credit reporting agencies.** By law you are entitled to one free report a year from each of the agencies. Order your free report by calling **1-877-322-8228 (TTY: Call 711 and refer the Relay Operator to 1-800-821-7232)** or visiting www.annualcreditreport.com.

Office of the Illinois Attorney General

Identity Theft Hotline

1-866-999-5630

TTY: 1-877-844-5461

www.IllinoisAttorneyGeneral.gov

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IDENTITY THEFT



We Can Help.



LISA MADIGAN
ILLINOIS ATTORNEY GENERAL

Identify theft occurs when a criminal obtains and uses someone else's personal information—such as credit card numbers, bank account numbers and social security numbers—to purchase goods and services fraudulently. Identity theft varies widely in scope and proportion. It can be an isolated incident, as when a thief makes an unauthorized charge to a victim's credit card. Or, in extreme cases, an imposter may use a victim's identity to open new credit card accounts, establish utilities and even take out loans for a car or home.

Victims of identity theft lose more than money: they lose peace of mind. Victims often spend dozens of hours working with creditors, credit reporting agencies, financial institutions and law enforcement to reclaim their good names and credit records. The recovery process can take months—even years.

WE CAN HELP

If you are a victim of identity theft, call the Illinois Attorney General's Identity Theft Hotline at 1-866-999-5630 (TTY: 1-877-844-5461). You will be assigned a Consumer Advocate to guide you through the recovery process. Depending on your needs, the Consumer Advocate can help you:

- Dispute a fraudulent debt and clean up your credit report;
- Contact appropriate law enforcement agencies;
- Read through and understand documents related to the crime;
- Determine what to do if your wallet or purse has been stolen; and
- Take steps to prevent yourself from further victimization.

The hotline is open from 8:45 a.m. to 4:45 p.m., Monday through Friday.

TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION: FIRST STEPS

A fast response to identity theft is the best way to minimize the damage to your name and financial health. The Office of the Illinois Attorney General therefore recommends that you immediately take the following first steps:

- **Report fraud to creditors.** Check with credit card companies and banks to see if any new accounts have been opened in your name or if any unauthorized charges have been made. Work with these companies to stop further damage as quickly as possible. You may wish to close bank accounts immediately, but remember to make sure that all outstanding checks clear before you do so. Once you verify that all legitimate checks have cleared, talk to your bank about closing compromised accounts and setting up new, password-protected accounts.

Once you have notified banks and credit card companies of the fraud, you should also alert your other creditors, including phone companies, utility providers, internet service providers and other service providers.

- **Place a fraud alert on your credit report.** Contact the toll-free number of any of the three consumer reporting agencies, listed below, to place a fraud alert on your credit report. A fraud alert notifies potential creditors to contact you and verify your identity before approving a credit request in your name. You only need to contact one of the three companies, because that company is required to contact the other two.

Once you place a fraud alert on your file, you are entitled to free copies of your credit reports. You will receive a letter telling you how to order your free copies. When you receive your credit reports, review them carefully and look for any suspicious activity.

- **File a police report.** Illinois law requires police departments to accept and provide reports. Get a copy of the police report or, at the very least, the number of the report. It can help you deal with creditors who need proof of the crime.
- **Decide whether you want to place a security freeze on your credit report.** A security freeze allows you to prohibit your credit report from being released to another person without your prior express authorization, which can help to prevent identity theft when personal information has been compromised. The freeze is available free of charge. Once the freeze is in place, you will be unable to obtain credit without first providing the consumer reporting agency with appropriate proof of your identity using a point of contact designated by the consumer reporting agency. You can place a security freeze by sending a request by certified mail to each consumer reporting agency. The credit reporting agencies also accept online and phone requests from most people.

Equifax: 1-800-525-6285; www.equifax.com;
P.O. Box 105069, Atlanta, GA 30348

Experian: 1-888-EXPERIAN (397-3742);
www.experian.com; P.O. Box 9554, Allen,
TX 75013

TransUnion: 1-800-680-7289;
www.transunion.com; P.O. Box 2000,
Chester, PA 19016