



Consumer Corner

by Illinois Attorney General LISA MADIGAN



New Law Allows Consumers to ‘Freeze’ Credit Reports, Reduce Risk of ID Theft

As of January 1, 2007, Illinois residents have a new tool to protect themselves from identity theft. In this month’s column, Attorney General Madigan explains how the recently enacted security freeze law gives consumers more control over who gets to see their credit reports.

Q. I’ve heard that consumers can now protect themselves from identity theft by putting a “freeze” on their credit reports. Could you explain how a freeze works and how I go about getting one?

A. Under an important new law that my office worked to pass, every Illinois consumer has the right to place a security freeze on his or her credit report, beginning January 1, 2007. A security freeze puts a lock on your files with the three major credit reporting agencies—TransUnion, Experian, and Equifax—so that potential creditors cannot access your credit history without your permission.

Because most businesses will not open credit accounts without first checking a consumer’s credit history, a security freeze is a powerful way to protect yourself from identity thieves. With a freeze on your credit report, even an imposter who has your name and Social Security number probably will not be able to obtain credit in your name.

To place a freeze on your credit report, you must submit a written request to each of the three credit bureaus. The bureaus have five days from receiving your request to put the freeze in place. Each bureau will send you a confirmation letter containing a unique PIN (personal identification number). You will use the PIN when you are in the market for credit and wish to authorize a temporary lift on your credit report.

Credit bureaus have up to three days to “thaw” a freeze once you authorize them to do so. In most instances, the wait should be far shorter. You can avoid delays by planning ahead. If you know you’ll be shopping for credit on a Saturday or Sunday, you can call the bureaus during the week to get the freeze lifted temporarily for the weekend. You also can authorize your credit reports to be released only to a specific creditor, such as a department store or car dealer.

Each credit bureau will charge you \$10 to place a freeze. There is no charge for victims of identity theft and seniors 65 years old or older. It will cost you \$10 to lift or remove the freeze, unless you are a victim of identity theft, in which case there is no fee.

For more information on the security freeze, including sample request letters to each of the credit bureaus, please visit my Web site at www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov. Click on the green “Identity Theft Hotline” icon on the home page. You also can obtain more information by calling our Identity Theft Hotline at 1-866-999-5630 (TTY: 1-877-844-5461).