

PRESS RELEASE



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For Immediate Release

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**MADIGAN ANNOUNCES ACTIVATION OF ID THEFT HOTLINE;
HELP LINE IS FIRST OF ITS KIND IN THE NATION**

Chicago – With new Federal Trade Commission (FTC) data revealing that more than 11,000 Illinoisans were victimized by identity theft in 2005, Attorney General Lisa Madigan today announced that the Attorney General’s new Identity Theft Hotline has been activated and advocates are trained and ready to assist consumers struggling with the devastating after-effects of identity theft.

Madigan’s new Identity Theft Hotline, which became active yesterday, February 6, is the first of its kind in the nation, offering a dedicated toll-free number staffed by advocates specially trained to help victims repair their credit, dispute fraudulent debts and prevent future victimization. Consumers statewide may now call the Identity Theft Hotline by dialing **1-866-999-5630**. The TTY number is **1-877-844-5461**.

Madigan’s office already has received considerable response to the hotline since media reports in mid-January previewed the program. In just two weeks, and before the hotline number was activated, Madigan’s office received more than 70 calls on the already-established Consumer Fraud Hotline, which is separate from the new Identity Theft Hotline. Those calls were handled by Madigan’s newly-trained Identity Theft Complaint Unit.

The staff members assigned to the Identity Theft Complaint Unit set Madigan’s program apart from others in the nation. The advocates have been trained to assist identity theft victims during their initial call and for the duration of the recovery process. In addition, Madigan has assigned a team of attorneys to the Unit to handle the larger legal and policy issues raised by the victims’ complaints.

“Identity theft victims are faced with an overwhelming recovery process that can consume 60 or more hours of their time,” Madigan said. “The new Identity Theft Hotline is intended to provide immediate counseling to help victims navigate a safe path to restored credit. The goal of this hotline is to provide direction, help and peace of mind.”

“Identity theft poses unique challenges to local law enforcement,” said Joe Pena, East Dundee Chief of Police and President of the Illinois Chiefs of Police Association, who joined Madigan at this afternoon’s news conference. “The victim often discovers the crime well after the fact, giving the thief ample time to cover his tracks. The Chiefs of Police look forward to working with

Attorney General Madigan to develop strategies that will place more identity thieves behind bars.”

The new FTC consumer fraud data was released in advance of National Consumer Protection Week, which runs this year from February 5 through 11. According to the data, the FTC received 11,137 identity theft complaints from Illinois victims in 2005. Credit card fraud and phone or utilities fraud accounted for almost 50 percent of those complaints. Identity theft complaints comprised 43 percent of all Illinois consumer complaints received in 2005 by the FTC.

In addition, Madigan’s office received 325 complaints in 2005 concerning identity theft. This number is low relative to the FTC’s numbers because the FTC is required to collect all identity theft data. While Madigan’s office will continue to report identity theft data to the FTC, she believes her office can provide hands-on help for consumers trying to resolve issues stemming from identity theft.

“As the state’s chief consumer advocate, the Office of the Attorney General is dedicated to assisting victims of the fastest-growing consumer fraud – identity theft,” Madigan said.

Depending on the individual victim’s needs, the Identity Theft Complaint Unit’s two dedicated staff members will guide the victim through the process of disputing a fraudulent debt, placing a fraud alert on the victim’s credit report, contacting the appropriate law enforcement agencies or all of the above.

In addition, Madigan’s office is distributing posters to the Chiefs of Police to be posted in local stations. Brochures also are being distributed across the state to inform consumers about the new services being provided by the Office. Finally, Madigan’s office has created an Identity Theft Resource Guide, which details the initial steps consumers should take, how to handle specific problems that may be encountered while clearing a consumer’s credit, the consumer’s legal rights and what to watch for in the future. These materials are all available online at www.IllinoisAttorneyGeneral.gov/consumers/hotline.html

Madigan also announced she will convene the first-ever Illinois Identity Theft Summit this spring to coordinate and improve statewide efforts to prevent, prosecute and assist victims in recovering from this devastating crime. Madigan said she will invite members of law enforcement agencies, consumer groups, government and businesses, including lenders and credit reporting agencies, to the summit.

Additionally, Madigan said she plans at this time to bring together a law enforcement working group to identify and work to resolve law enforcement issues related to identity theft, particularly the filing of police reports by identity theft victims.

Illinoisans may contact the Office of the Attorney General’s Identity Theft Hotline by dialing **1-866-999-5630**. The TTY number is **1-877-844-5461 (TTY)**.

For more information on identity theft prevention and recovery, please visit Madigan’s Web site at www.IllinoisAttorneyGeneral.gov/consumers/hotline.html.

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