



For Immediate Release

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July 13, 2006

MADIGAN CONVENES FIRST EVER ILLINOIS IDENTITY THEFT SUMMIT

ATTORNEY GENERAL REVEALS WINDOW ON ID THEFT IN STATE

Lisle, IL – With identity theft incidents and breaches of personal information on the rise, Attorney General Lisa Madigan today convened the first-ever Illinois Identity Theft Summit to bring representatives from law enforcement, the court system, government, business and consumer advocacy groups together to brainstorm about how to provide better services to victims of identity theft and develop more effective strategies for preventing the fastest growing crime in the nation.

Speaking at the summit, Madigan also detailed for the first time the current results of her Identity Theft Hotline, which has been in operation since February of this year. The Hotline, the first of its kind in the nation, is a dedicated resource with advocates on hand to assist victims through every stage of the recovery process. Since February of this year, the hotline has handled nearly 3,000 requests for assistance.

Madigan noted that by far the leading form of identity theft is credit card theft, with 723 complaints coming into the Hotline. Identity thieves opened up new accounts in 511 of those cases, and made fraudulent charges on existing accounts in 212 instances.

Six hundred twenty-five Illinoisans called the Hotline requesting an ID Theft Kit and to ask general questions about how to protect their identity, while 331 Illinoisans called to report that an identity thief had opened up a new utility account in their name.

Three hundred twenty-one callers reported having inadvertently given out their Social Security number or lost their card, resulting in stolen numbers, fraudulent driver's licenses and government benefits applied for and issued and bogus tax returns filed. In 284 other cases, identity theft ranged from debt incurred due to identity theft to an identity thief obtaining medical treatment with the victim's information, resulting in a facility incorrectly billing the victim.

“As you can see from the Hotline statistics, identity thieves will use your personal information to steal anything ranging from credit cards to medical services,” Madigan said. “Identity theft is a crime that has become a national

tidal wave of fraud, affecting consumers, businesses, law enforcement and others.”

Madigan said that more than 11,000 Illinois residents filed identity theft complaints in 2005 with the Federal Trade Commission, making Illinois 10 th in the nation for identity theft. Madigan noted that the identity theft statistics don't capture the millions of consumers affected by security breaches, which in the last year have become frequent occurrences.

“We have with us today representatives from law enforcement, the court system, government, business and consumer advocacy groups. This summit was organized around the belief that by working together, we can provide better services to victims of identity theft and develop more effective strategies for preventing one of the biggest consumer fraud threats of our time,” Madigan said. “Some of us already know each other and exchange vital information about our work and some of us have collaborated on major initiatives. But until today, we haven't all sat down in the same room with the goal of establishing ongoing working relationships and networks that will benefit consumers far into the future.”

Madigan said that Illinois has been among the most proactive states in responding to identity theft. In the last few years, the state has enacted some of the strongest privacy protection and victim assistance laws in the nation, including:

- A law that gives victims of identity theft the option of placing a security freeze on their credit reports. This law was amended in the last legislative session to extend this important option to non-victims as well.
- A law, among the first in the nation, requiring data collectors to notify consumers in the event that the security of their personal information has been breached.
- A law that requires police to take a report from identity theft victims. Under this same law, victims of criminal identity theft -- in other words, victims whose names have been wrongfully associated with a criminal act -- now have access to an expedited court procedure by which they can clear their names.

Madigan said these laws and others have given consumers powerful new tools; however, victims often need additional help to recover from identity theft and prevent further harm.

The Attorney General encouraged victims of identity theft to call the Hotline at 1-866-999-5630/(TTY) 1-877-844-5461 or visit her Web site at IllinoisAttorneyGeneral.gov for more information on how to prevent this crime.

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