



A SECURITY FREEZE CAN PROTECT TEXANS FROM IDENTITY THEFT

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

IDENTITY THEFT IS ONE OF THE nation's fastest-growing, most expensive criminal enterprises. When personally identifying information, such as Social Security numbers, falls into the wrong hands, Texans may suffer ruined credit and huge, undeserved debts. Identity thieves use stolen information to obtain new credit cards; open checking accounts; make long distance or collect calls; or make purchases on a stolen credit card.

Now, Texans have a new law to help with the ongoing fight against identity theft. Beginning Sept. 1, Texans may contact the three major credit bureaus to request a security freeze on their credit accounts – without first obtaining a police report.

Previously, Texans could only place a security freeze on their credit files after obtaining a police report documenting identity theft. Thanks to Senate Bill 222, which took effect Sept. 1, all Texans can freeze their accounts without first obtaining a police report.

A security freeze enables consumers to stop identity thieves from obtaining credit in their names. A security freeze locks, or freezes, access to consumers' credit reports and credit scores. Without this information, a creditor will not issue new lines of credit to a borrower. When consumers want new credit, they can use a personal identification number (PIN) to unlock access to their credit accounts.

Under the new law, credit bureaus may charge consumers who do not have a police report up to \$10 to freeze credit accounts. The bureaus may also charge up to \$12 to temporarily lift the freeze for a specific creditor or remove the freeze altogether. Consumers should contact each of the three credit bureaus for more information on their fees.

Once the security freeze is in place, consumers will receive written confirmation from each credit reporting bureau. The freeze will remain in place until the consumer uses a PIN to request that the freeze be temporarily lifted

or removed.

Texans should remember that a security freeze, while an effective safeguard, may not be for everyone. Consumers planning to apply for new credit, an apartment rental, or employment involving a background check may find that a security freeze is somewhat inconvenient. It may take up to three days for a credit bureau to temporarily lift or remove a security freeze. On the other hand, Texans who have little need for new lines of credit may benefit from this new law.

The Office of the Attorney General is committed to fighting identity theft. Potential identity theft victims should review our online Identity Theft Victim's Kit at www.oag.state.tx.us. The kit is designed to help victims begin the process of recovering, both financially and legally. It includes relevant forms and agency contact information that helps victims restore credit and prevent further damage to their good name.

POINTS TO REMEMBER



PLACING A SECURITY FREEZE ON CREDIT REPORTS

To have a security freeze placed on your credit file without obtaining a police report, contact the three credit reporting agencies:

EXPERIAN

P. O. Box 9554
Allen, TX 75013
(888) 397-3742 or www.experian.com

EQUIFAX

P. O. Box 105788
Atlanta, GA 30348
(800) 685-1111 or www.equifax.com

TRANS UNION

P. O. Box 6790
Fullerton, CA 92834
(877) 680-7289 or www.transunion.com

For a free copy of your credit report:

Annual Credit Report Request Service
P. O. Box 105281
Atlanta, GA 30348-5281
(877) 322-8228 or www.annualcreditreport.com

To file a complaint with the Office of the Attorney General: (800) 252-8011 or www.oag.state.tx.us



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