

House Republican Press Release

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A VIEW FROM THE INSIDE
State Representative Ruth Fahrbach



**New law protects confidentiality of
Social Security numbers**

During the 2008 legislative session, the General Assembly passed *An Act Concerning the Confidentiality of Social Security Numbers*. The bill is aimed at combating identity theft by protecting the confidentiality of Social Security numbers and other personal information. The new law applies to anyone who collects Social Security numbers in connection with its business, as well as anyone in possession of "personal information" of another person.

As the non-partisan Office of Legislative Research indicates in a report compiled on the bill, the law requires anyone possessing personal information about another person to safeguard it and the computer files and documents that contain it. "Personal information" is information that can be associated with an individual through an identifier like a Social Security number. The new law also requires a business that collects Social Security numbers to create a privacy protection policy that must ensure confidentiality of Social Security numbers.

Violators of the new law are subject to a civil penalty of \$500 for each violation, up to a maximum of \$500,000 per violation.

The act requires anyone in possession of personal information about another person to safeguard the data and computer files and documents containing it from misuse by third parties and to destroy, erase, or make unreadable any document, computer file, or data before disposing of it. For this purpose, "personal information" means information capable of being associated with a particular individual through one or more identifiers, such as a Social Security number, driver's license number, state identification card number, account number, credit or debit card number, passport number, alien registration number, or health insurance identification number.

It does not, however, include publicly available information lawfully made available from federal, state, or local government records or widely distributed media. Another important safeguard is requiring anyone that collects Social Security numbers in the course of business to create a privacy protection policy that must be published or publicly

displayed, which includes posting it on an Internet web page. The policy must ensure confidentiality of Social Security numbers, prohibit their unlawful disclosure, and limit access to them.

The law also prohibits:

1. Intentionally communicating or otherwise making available to the general public an individual's Social Security number;
2. Printing anyone's Social Security number on a card that the person or entity must use to access the person or entity's products or services;
3. Requiring anyone to transmit his or her Social Security number over the Internet, unless the connection is secure or the number is encrypted; or
4. Requiring anyone to use his or her Social Security number to access an Internet web site, unless a password or unique personal identification number or other authentication is also required to access it.

Unfortunately, identity theft and the stealing of personal information has been on the rise as we enter the information age. Provided it is enforced, this law is intended to help combat that problem.

State Rep. Ruth Fahrback represents the 61st District, including Suffield, and parts of Windsor and East Granby, in the General Assembly.