



JENNIFER BRUNNER'S 5-POINT PLAN FOR PROTECTING OHIOANS' PRIVATE INFORMATION AND COMBATTING IDENTITY THEFT

What is identity theft?

Identity theft happens when one person's identifying information, such as name, social security number, or any account number is used or transferred by another person for unlawful activities.

Why does identity theft matter?

Victims of identity theft spend vast amounts of time closing bad accounts, opening new ones and repairing credit reports—all to clear their name. Victims of identity theft can be denied loans and jobs and can even be arrested by mistake when crimes are committed in their name.

The FBI calls identity theft one of the fastest growing crimes in the U.S. and estimates that 500,000 to 700,000 Americans become identity theft victims each year.

Ohio is ranked 29th out of 50 in reports of identity theft. Recent thefts of Ohio information have occurred using the Hamilton County Clerk of Courts' website, from the Butler County MRDD office, and from Ohio University. Social security numbers have been posted on the website of the Ohio Secretary of State, resulting in a class action lawsuit settled with a promise by the Secretary of State to remove this private information from his website.

What is the role of the Ohio Secretary of State in protecting Ohioans' private information and combating identity theft?

The Ohio Secretary of State is a major record keeper for Ohio's individual and corporate citizens. Often, business filings contain social security numbers. These must not be placed on the Secretary of State's website, and the law provides that they should be removed before records containing them are disclosed to the public.

Voting by absentee and at least some in-person voting will now require voters to show sensitive forms of identification, such as partial social security numbers, drivers license numbers, bank statements, utility bills, government checks and other documents. These items will be presented to Ohio's 88 county boards of elections. Currently, the Secretary of State has failed to provide boards with specific or uniform instructions on what to do with this sensitive information, leaving it up to each board to devise its own plan.

What is Jennifer Brunner's 5-point plan?

1. Stop the outsourcing of confidential information to private contractors, returning the responsibility to Secretary of State employees, to protect Ohioans' private information.
2. Better train employees and boards of elections in reviewing filed documents to spot private information that is required to be protected from public view and maintain and enforce procedures that protect that information from public disclosure.
3. Convene a task force of state agencies, along with the Ohio Attorney General, to craft consistent policies throughout state government on protecting private information and referring identity theft for prosecution.
4. Increase public awareness of identity theft, how to prevent it and what to do if you're a victim through educational programs to help individuals know their rights and how to protect their private information.
5. Propose legislation to allow a person to petition a court for a "factual declaration of innocence" that is then filed with the Secretary of State in a "Victims of Identity Theft Registry" to help consumers clear their credit reports sooner.