



OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
STATE OF ARIZONA

TERRY GODDARD
ATTORNEY GENERAL

May 25, 2005

The Honorable John McCain
241 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator McCain:

As you know, Arizona is at the center of our nation's identity theft epidemic. According to the Federal Trade Commission, Arizona ranked number one in ID theft complaints among the states last year, and metro Phoenix ranked number one among all metropolitan areas in the country.

I am writing to ask your help in taking a critical step to prevent identity theft by removing Social Security numbers from Medicare cards, which are sent to some 41 million Americans. Social Security numbers should also be taken off veterans' benefit cards held by seven million Americans, and Department of Defense identification cards held by eight million Americans.

Action to remove these numbers is seriously overdue. A November 2004 report from the General Accounting Office noted that Social Security numbers "are a lynchpin to other personal information held in a variety of records. The extent to which they are exposed to public view, of course, increases the likelihood that they will be misused for inappropriate mining of personal information, violation of privacy and identity theft."

The report went on to warn "there is jeopardy in the display of Social Security numbers on identity and eligibility cards issued under government auspices. The cardholder is usually required to use his or her card at the point of service - which means a practical need to carry and display it often - thus increasing the likelihood for accidental loss, theft or visual exposure."

The General Accounting Office went on to suggest that it is possible to substitute another number for the Social Security number on recipients' cards and link it to the actual Social Security number in a protected database.

This change was also recommended last year by Consumers Union, the organization that publishes Consumer Reports magazine. Michael McCauley, a spokesman for the group, said, "It just seemed ridiculous to me that at a time when some health-care insurers were phasing them out, the federal government would be using these numbers" on Medicare cards.

In Arizona, we are doing our part to prevent identity theft. Arizona now issues a number other than a Social Security number on drivers' licenses. Further, health insurance providers no longer use Social Security numbers on employees' health insurance cards in our State.

My Office has launched several initiatives to educate consumers and prevent identity theft. This campaign includes brochures, bookmarks, videotapes and DVDs available in English and Spanish. These prevention steps are a solid start, but more needs to be done. Removing Social Security numbers from Medicare and other federally issued cards would directly and significantly reduce the opportunities for identity thieves.

I hope you will support legislation or appropriate policy changes to remove Social Security numbers from widespread exposure, and provide greater security to the thousands of Arizonans who must carry these essential identification cards.

My Office is anxious to work with you or your staff to craft viable alternatives to the use of the Social Security numbers on Medicare, Veteran and Department of Defense identification cards. Please let me know if I can provide further information. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Terry Goddard
Arizona Attorney General