

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
ATTORNEY GENERAL



55 Elm Street
P.O. Box 120
Hartford, CT 06141-0120

Office of The Attorney General
State of Connecticut

TESTIMONY OF
ATTORNEY GENERAL RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
BEFORE THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
MARCH 5, 2007

I appreciate the opportunity to support Senate Bill 821, An Act Requiring a Disclosure Statement When a State or Local Government Agency Requests an Individual's Social Security Number.

This legislation requires that every state or municipal agency disclose whether any request for social security numbers is voluntary or mandatory. It must also state whether the statutory basis for its request and all uses for such information.

Calls to my office and other evidence indicate that these requests for Social Security numbers by government agencies have become all too common -- even routine -- without real justification let alone necessity. Protections must be imposed. Indeed, present federal law sets standards. Good policy demands them. Now state law should send a message that state and local agencies will follow exacting standards and request social security numbers only when absolutely necessary. Privacy should not be invaded and personal information disclosed heedlessly or needlessly.

Social Security numbers are highly sensitive information, vital to accurately identifying an individual but also a common, critical source of identity theft. Disclosure of such information should be required only when absolutely necessary. Under the Federal Privacy Act of 1974, governmental entities are restricted as to requesting social security numbers from the public. I have also advocated state legislation to protect the privacy of Social Security numbers, including Conn. Gen. Stat. § 42-470 which restricts business requests for social security numbers of consumers.

The disclosure protections in Senate Bill 821 -- similar to 5 USC § 552a -- will make state and local agencies reconsider and possibly revise requests for social security numbers. This requirement that state agencies provide a statutory basis for requesting social security numbers will also increase the likelihood that my office will be made aware of such requests.

I will be sending a letter to all state agency heads asking for their review of requests for information from the public to ensure compliance with federal law and the provisions of this legislation. I will seek vigorously to assure that social security information is mandated by state agencies only when necessary to fulfill a specific statutory requirement.

I urge the committee's favorable consideration of Senate Bill 821.