

***The Ohio Attorney General's Office***

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**Identity Theft  
PASSPORT Program**

**2008 Annual Report**



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***Criminal Justice Initiatives Section***





Nancy H. Rogers  
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October 31, 2008

The Honorable Ted Strickland  
Governor of Ohio

The Honorable Bill Harris  
President of the Ohio Senate

The Honorable Ray Miller  
Ohio Senate Minority Leader

The Honorable Jon Husted  
Speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives

The Honorable Joyce Beatty  
Ohio House of Representatives Minority Leader

Re: Identity Theft Unit and Passport Program  
FY 2008 Annual Report

Dear Colleagues:

Pursuant to the requirements of Ohio Revised Code 109.94(C)(2), I am pleased to present to you the FY 2008 Annual Report for the Identity Theft Unit and Passport Program. This report details the office's efforts to address the vast scope of identity theft and its related issues, both in Ohio and across the nation.

The demand for leadership in the fight against identity theft is now greater than ever. I want to take this opportunity to remind you that our Identity Theft Unit offers publications and information regarding identity theft prevention and recovery. The Identity Theft Unit also provides training for citizens, law enforcement, and prosecutors.

If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact our Criminal Justice Initiatives Section at 614-466-3552, the Identity Theft Hotline at 1-888-MY-ID-4-ME (1-888-694-3463) or visit <http://www.ag.state.oh.us/victim/idtheft/index.asp>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy H. Rogers".

Nancy H. Rogers  
Attorney General



## **Ohio Attorney General's Identity Theft Unit FY 2008 Annual Report**

Identity theft is the fastest growing crime in the United States. It affects an estimated ten million persons yearly, yet less than 250,000 cases are reported to authorities. In sum, Americans spend an estimated 300 million hours per year resolving problems related to identity theft. Credit cards, utilities, bank accounts, employment records, tax returns, medical documents, and residential leases are among the fertile grounds for identity thieves. And while the statistics are often cited to illustrate the vast scope of the epidemic, it must not be forgotten that identity theft exacts an emotional and psychological impact on its individual victims, similar to that experienced by targets of violent crime.

The Ohio Attorney General's Office recognizes the seriousness of the identity theft problem. The Identity Theft Unit, working in conjunction with law enforcement, financial institutions, and community organizations, educates the public on identity theft prevention and recovery. And for those persons who become victims of identity theft, the Identity Theft Unit is a direct service provider of guidance and assistance to repair and restore credit and related problems.

### Identity Theft Verification Passport Program

The Passport program provides victims of identity theft with a wallet-sized card that can be used to help demonstrate – to law enforcement, financial institutions, businesses, and others - their status as a victim. In order to obtain a Passport card, victims must go to a law enforcement agency and file a police report. When law enforcement finds probable cause that an identity theft occurred, they apply for a Passport on behalf of the victim via OHLEG (Ohio Law Enforcement Gateway). As part of the application process, the following digital data is obtained from the victim: (1) Photo; (2) Fingerprint; and (3) Signature. This information is stored in the secure database along with the other basic information that is called for as part of the application process (i.e. name, address, social security number, and phone number).

Since its inception on December 14, 2004, over 1714 Passport cards have been issued to victims of identity theft across Ohio. In FY 2008, there were 353 Passport applications and 437 Passport cards were issued.<sup>1</sup> Throughout Ohio, 895 Law Enforcement Agencies have been trained on the Passport program.

A December 2007 Survey of over 900 Ohio identity theft victims revealed the following about the Passport program:

**39%** said their Passport card has already physically been helpful to them. The Passport card helped these victims with problems including: filing necessary paperwork, obtaining new drivers' licenses, preventive measures against identity theft, and proof of identity in various situations.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the processing time, the number of cards issued exceeds the number of Passport applications.

29% felt their Passport card gave them a sense of comfort and security, because they knew that they could now prove that they were not only a victim of identity theft, but also who they claimed to be.

74% said they would recommend the program because it is one of the only resources available to identity theft victims and it has helped.

Specific comments included:

*Thank you for giving me this. I had been dealing with this situation for 4 years and I was at my emotional breaking point.*

*Glad to know we have such a program to fall back on- Thank you.*

*Keep this program at whatever the cost.*

*I'm really glad for this program, for I have learned so much even though I was careful, and nothing was missing. They helped me see it wasn't my fault. Now, my husband has to watch because his information was in the records that were stolen.*

*Great program. Helps restore a good credible background.*

## IPAC

In response to the national epidemic of identity theft, the eleven states with established Passport programs have banded together to form the Identity Theft Passport Advisory Council (I-PAC): Arkansas, Delaware, Iowa, Florida, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, Virginia. The Federal Trade Commission, the Department of Justice and the National Notary Association are also members of I-PAC.<sup>2</sup> As the founding member of I-PAC, Ohio sits as chair of the group.<sup>3</sup> Relevant portions of the I-PAC Mission are as follows: 1) agreement that the problem of identity theft is a growing concern to the citizens of each respective state and the Passport Program can help the victims restore their good name and credit; 2) a resolve to educate and help victims recover from this particularly harmful crime through enhanced public awareness campaigns including uniform prevention techniques and establishing standardized recovery resources through the Passport Program; 3) the understanding that the creation of such a network requires an elevated level of communication, commitment and sharing of resources among the participating states.

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<sup>2</sup> The FTC, DOJ, and NNA, while I-PAC members, do not operate as active service providers.

<sup>3</sup> The member states look to Ohio for guidance on most issues – e.g., Ohio is overseeing the drafting of model national identity theft Passport legislation for non-member states to implement. In FY2008, Michigan, a non-member state, contacted the Identity Theft Unit directly to inquire about the details of Ohio's Passport program.

In FY 2008, I-PAC launched its website, [www.identitypassport.org](http://www.identitypassport.org). This website is used to increase information sharing amongst member states and functions as a place for non-member states to research the group and gain understanding of each respective state's Passport Program. As Chair of I-PAC, Ohio is responsible for updating and referring interested parties to the site.

### Assistance

The Identity Theft Unit responded to over 4,380 phone inquiries. The majority of these calls were from victims or potential victims seeking help in responding to specific instances of identity theft-related issues. In addition to the calls from victims, the Identity Theft Unit responded to inquiries from various members of the public, law enforcement, civic and community organizations, financial organizations, media and others.

### Education

The Identity Theft Unit conducted over 26 identity theft prevention and Passport presentations to requesting groups around Ohio. These groups include law enforcement (instructional training for officers), financial institutions, senior groups, community organizations, civic groups, government municipalities, victim advocates and various businesses.

The Identity Theft Unit also responded to inquiries from the media in connection with stories on identity theft-related issues. These stories further the education efforts of the unit. *See e.g. "Newark Police Department Offers Free Help to Identity Theft Victims," 4/23/08, Advocate Reporter.*

### Legislation

Ohio House Bill 46 was signed by the Governor on May 6, 2008.<sup>4</sup> HB 46 requires the Attorney General to, at the request of any law enforcement agency, "cooperate with and provide technical assistance \* \* \* with the enforcement of identity fraud crimes." The Identity Theft Unit currently acts as a liaison between law enforcement and other agencies that may provide assistance in the enforcement of identity fraud crimes. The unit is exploring other avenues in which they can provide technical assistance.

HB 46 also provides consumers with the ability to freeze their credit. This prohibits a credit reporting agency from releasing any information in a consumer's credit report without the express authorization or approval from the consumer. Credit freeze is designed to prevent credit, loans, and services from being approved without the consumer's consent.

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<sup>4</sup> Effective date: September 1, 2008



**CRIMINAL JUSTICE INITIATIVES SECTION**

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Columbus, Ohio 43215-3400  
(614) 466-3552  
Fax: (614) 728-9536

**FOR MORE INFORMATION REGARDING PASSPORT:**

(888) MY-ID-4-ME  
[(888) 694-3463]

**TO VERIFY A PASSPORT:**

(877) VERIFY-IT  
[(877) 837-4394]