

**Department of Legislative Services**  
Maryland General Assembly  
2006 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**

House Bill 1170  
Economic Matters

(Delegate Zirkin)

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**Consumer Protection - Personal Information Protection Act**

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This bill imposes duties on a “business” to protect an individual’s “personal information” and to provide notice of a security breach relating to an individual’s personal information.

Violation of the bill is an unfair or deceptive trade practice under the Maryland Consumer Protection Act.

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** Assuming that the Consumer Protection Division receives fewer than 50 complaints per year stemming from this bill, any additional workload could be handled with existing resources.

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** Minimal.

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**Analysis**

**Bill Summary:** When a business is destroying a customer’s records containing the customer’s personal information, the business must take all reasonable steps to destroy or arrange for the destruction of the records in a manner that makes the information unreadable or undecipherable.

A business that owns or licenses personal information of a Maryland resident must implement and maintain reasonable and appropriate security procedures and practices to

protect the personal information from unauthorized access, destruction, use, modification, or disclosure. A business that discloses personal information under a contract with a nonaffiliated third party must require by contract that the third party comply with these requirements.

A business that owns, licenses, or maintains records that include a Maryland resident's personal information must notify that individual of a breach of the security of a system if, as a result of the breach, the individual's personal information: (1) has been acquired by an unauthorized person; or (2) is reasonably believed to have been acquired by an unauthorized person. Generally, the notice must be given as soon as practicable after the business discovers or is notified about the breach.

The notification may be delayed: (1) if a law enforcement agency determines that it will impede a criminal investigation; or (2) to determine the scope of the breach and restore the system's integrity.

The notification may be given by written notice or electronic notice, if the electronic notice meets the requirements for electronic records and signatures under the federal Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act. A business must notify the Office of the Attorney General of the breach within 24 hours after it becomes aware of the breach. A waiver of the bill's notification requirements is void and unenforceable. Compliance with the notification requirements does not relieve a business from a duty to comply with any other legal requirements relating to the protection and privacy of personal information.

In addition to the penalties under the Consumer Protection Act, an individual who is affected by a violation may bring a civil action against a violator to recover reasonable attorney's fees and the greater of \$500 per violation or actual damages.

**Current Law:** A business's practices regarding records that contain personal information is not specifically regulated.

The Consumer Protection Division within the Office of the Attorney General is responsible for pursuing unfair and deceptive trade practice claims under the Maryland Consumer Protection Act. Upon receiving a complaint, the division must determine whether there are "reasonable grounds" to believe that a violation of the Act has occurred. Generally, if the division does find reasonable grounds that a violation has occurred, the division must seek to conciliate the complaint. The division may also issue cease and desist orders, or seek action in court, including an injunction or civil damages, to enforce the Act. Violators of the Act are subject to: (1) civil penalties of \$1,000 for

the first violation and \$5,000 for subsequent violations; and (2) criminal sanction as a misdemeanor, with a fine of up to \$1,000 and/or up to one year's imprisonment.

**Background:** The Federal Trade Commission recently announced that ChoicePoint, Inc. would pay a civil penalty of \$10 million and \$5 million in consumer redress for violating the federal Fair Credit Reporting Act for failing to have adequate protections for wrongfully releasing consumer information. The settlement requires ChoicePoint to implement new procedures: (1) to ensure that it provides consumer reports only to legitimate businesses for lawful purposes; (2) to establish and maintain a comprehensive information security program; and (3) to obtain audits by an independent third-party security professional every other year until 2026.

Under the guidelines adopted jointly by federal banking regulators “[w]hen a financial institution becomes aware of an incident of unauthorized access to sensitive customer information, the institution should conduct a reasonable investigation to promptly determine the likelihood that the information has been or will be misused. If the institution determines that the misuse of its information about a customer has occurred or is reasonably possible, it should notify the affected customer as soon as possible.”

Several bills have been introduced in Congress that would establish federal standards for notifying individuals whose personal information may have been wrongfully obtained. Some of the bills contain broad preemption of similar state laws and state enforcement actions based on a violation of federal law. Others contain narrower preemptions and allow states to enforce their provisions in state or federal court.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** Identical bills, SB 1002 and HB 1588, were introduced during the 2005 session. SB 1002 was referred to the Senate Rules Committee, and HB 1588 was referred to the House Economic Matters Committee. Both bills were withdrawn before being heard.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Office of the Attorney General (Consumer Protection Division), Department of Legislative Services

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Analysis by: T. Ryan Wilson

Direct Inquiries to:  
(410) 946-5510  
(301) 970-5510