



# COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF CAROLINE COUNTY

Office of the County Administrator

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## NOTICE OF DATA BREACH

We are contacting you about a data breach that has occurred at Caroline County government.

### What Happened?

On February 5<sup>th</sup> an employee working in the Office of Finance received an email that appeared to come from the County Administrator. The email asked for a digital copy of the County's 2017 W-2 forms. The employee sent the information not realizing the email was a phishing scam. In late February, we began hearing reports from employees about fraudulent income tax filings. On February 27<sup>th</sup>, we discovered the data breach.

### What Information Was Involved?

A W-2 contains identifying information including the employee's name, address, wages, taxes paid, and social security number.

### What We Are Doing

We have notified local, state, and federal law enforcement of the data breach. A criminal investigation is underway. We also have informed the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and Maryland's Office of the Comptroller, the state agency responsible for tax collection. Obviously, we have made immediate changes to the handling of sensitive information including employee data.

We are consulting with experts to determine other steps we should take. The County Commissioners have agreed to provide an identity theft protection service to all impacted individuals at no cost. We are working to find a provider as quickly as possible. We'll be scheduling meetings to provide further information and answer questions.

### What Can You Do?

We recommend that you place a fraud alert on your credit file immediately. A fraud alert tells creditors to contact you before they open any new accounts or change your existing accounts. Call any one of the three major credit bureaus. As soon as one credit bureau confirms your fraud alert, the others are

notified to place fraud alerts. The initial fraud alert stays on your credit report for 90 days. You can renew it after 90 days.

**Equifax:** equifax.com or 1-800-525-6285

**Experian:** experian.com or 1-888-397-3742

**TransUnion:** transunion.com or 1-800-680-7289

Request that all three credit reports be sent to you, free of charge, for your review. Even if you do not find any suspicious activity on your initial credit reports, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) recommends that you check your credit reports periodically. Thieves may hold stolen information to use at different times. Checking your credit reports periodically can help you spot problems and address them quickly.

If you find suspicious activity on your credit reports or have reason to believe your information is being misused, file a police report and call the Caroline County Sheriff's Office at 410-479-5028. The lead investigator is Det. Justin Reibly.

We have asked the Sheriff's Office to provide copies of the police report; you may need it to clear up any fraudulent debts. If your personal information has been misused, visit the FTC's site at [www.IdentityTheft.gov](http://www.IdentityTheft.gov) to get recovery steps and to file an identity theft complaint. Your complaint will be added to the FTC's Consumer Sentinel Network. You also may want to consider contacting the major credit bureaus at the telephone numbers above to place a credit freeze on your credit file. A credit freeze means potential creditors cannot get your credit report. That makes it less likely that an identify thief can open new accounts in your name. The cost to place and lift a freeze depends on state law.

## **Tax Returns**

Some employees have received letters from the Maryland Comptroller and/or the Internal Revenue Service informing them of a suspicious tax return filing. Others have tried to file a return for 2017 and have had the return rejected because the same social security number had been used to file another return.

If a fraudulent Maryland tax return was filed using your social security number, please contact Maryland's Taxpayer Service number at 1-800-638-2937 between 8:30 AM-4:30 PM. If a fraudulent federal return was filed using your social security number, please contact the IRS at 1-800-829-1040 or go online to <http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/Identity-Protection>.

Getting through to the IRS on the via phone can be difficult. Again, if you find any evidence of a fraudulent return or credit fraud, try the FTC website: <https://www.identitytheft.gov/>.

## **Other Important Information:**

The point of contact for all questions is the County's Office of Human Resources. You can reach our HR professionals at 410-479-4043 during normal working hours. We will provide routine updates through mail, email, and on the County's ADP payroll web portal. We will be holding employee meetings very soon and will continue to provide you with information as we learn more.

## **Summary**

The Office of Finance has a well-established record of fiscal responsibility. What happened was an isolated human error, albeit one with profound consequences. We are deeply sorry it happened and are strongly committed to limiting the damage.

Sincerely,

Ken Decker  
County Administrator