



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## How Safe Is Your Identity?

PATTY RITCHIE June 1, 2015

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### Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

Did you know that every 19 minutes, someone falls victim to identity theft? Today, identity theft is the fastest growing crime in America, affecting more than 12.7 million people last year alone. Identity theft has the power to ruin credit and wreak havoc on reputations, and it costs victims roughly \$16 billion annually.

While New Yorkers have grown used to safeguarding their checkbooks, credit cards and other information from those seeking to steal their identity, as you may have heard from recent media reports, the state DMV is selling that very same personal information to the highest bidder.

That's why I recently sponsored legislation to prohibit the DMV from selling personal information without consent. Under Senate bill 5668, drivers would decide whether the DMV could sell their personal information. The measure would require drivers to "opt-in" to any DMV-sponsored program that sells information and exceptions would be allowed for recalls as well as similar notices having to do with vehicle safety.

In addition, I've also launched an online petition, where you can sign on and show your support for my legislation and tell the DMV that your privacy is "not for sale." The petition—which has already been signed by more than 1,000 individuals—can be [found here](#).

Identity theft is both preventable and fixable, however, we still need to be extra vigilant when it comes to protecting the privacy of our personal information. Here are some quick tips for making sure you don't become a victim:

- Be sure to shred bank statements, receipts, returned checks and other similar documents;
- Avoid carrying unnecessary items like extra credit cards, your passport, Social Security card or birth certificate with you;
- Many identity thieves may pose as government agencies or banks, calling you to get personal information. To be safe, if you haven't initiated the call, don't provide personal information over the phone;
- Make sure your passwords or PIN numbers vary—similar passwords make you an easier target for identity theft; and
- Keep personal information in a safe place, such as a safe or locked filing cabinet

There are many more steps you can take to protect your personal information from identity thieves. If you're concerned about safeguarding your privacy, don't forget to visit my website, [www.ritchie.nysenate.gov](http://www.ritchie.nysenate.gov) and sign my petition to help stop the DMV from selling your personal information without your consent.