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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Report Reviews Safeguards to Protect Public Disclosure of Social Security Numbers in Tennessee Government Records**

**NASHVILLE, Tenn.** - Although most government agencies in Tennessee take measures to protect Social Security numbers from public disclosure, some lack written agency-level policies or procedures directing staff on appropriate and consistent safeguards for Social Security numbers in their records, according to a report released today by the Comptroller of the Treasury's Office of Research.

The report, "Safeguarding Social Security Numbers in Tennessee Government Records," reviews current state and local governments' policies and practices to protect the disclosure of Social Security numbers to the public. Increased Social Security number collection and use has generated concern among policy makers and consumer advocates because of potential misuse by identity thieves. Areas of particular concern include Social Security numbers stored on portable electronic data storage devices and computer workstations, and the consistent handling of data security breaches involving Social Security numbers.

Tennessee state and local agencies maintain a large number of Social Security numbers in their records, but in most instances, federal or state law restrict their public access and release. Few state and local agencies surveyed by the Office of Research reported security breaches since 2000. No agencies reported known links to identity theft as a result.

Tennessee government agencies have reduced Social Security number use, but further reductions may be possible. Reviewing Social Security number use can help agency staff identify areas where Social Security numbers may not be necessary and where a substitute number would suffice.

The survey also found variation in the treatment of records containing Social Security numbers by local officials. Several local government agencies indicated that they redacted Social Security numbers prior to releasing records to the public, while others did not do so. Tennessee law does not clearly direct local government record custodians on the treatment of Social Security numbers in agency records.

*(MORE)*

The report provides the following recommendations to the General Assembly:

- Appoint state and local government study committees to review government use and transmission of the Social Security number, the feasibility of further reductions of Social Security numbers in government records, and confidential records statutes;
- Require local governments to develop specific, written policies on the protection of personal or confidential information in their paper and electronic records;
- Require additional records management assistance and training resources for local government officials; and
- Require additional oversight to ensure that state and local agencies have developed and implemented information security policies and practices to protect confidential information, including Social Security numbers maintained in their records.

The report, “Safeguarding Social Security Numbers in Tennessee Government Records,” is available on the Comptroller of the Treasury’s website at [www.comptroller.state.tn.us](http://www.comptroller.state.tn.us).

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Download Report Snapshot (PDF 60 kb):

<http://www.comptroller1.state.tn.us/repository/NR/finalsnapshot.pdf>

Download Full Report (PDF 249 kb):

<http://www.comptroller1.state.tn.us/repository/RE/SSN2008.pdf>

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