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For Immediate Release

Georgia's Top Cop Breaks from Campaign to Promote Shredding Law

Atlanta, GA – Georgia's Attorney General, Thurbert E. Baker, took time away from his busy campaign schedule to address the mostly out-of-state delegates of the National Association for Information Destruction (NAID) on the importance of the state's recent legislation requiring businesses to destroy discarded personal information.

"Identity theft is no longer just the fastest growing 'white collar' crime, or the fastest growing 'information' crime," said Baker. "It is the fastest growing crime in America of any kind, period. It is time that businesses recognize their responsibility to stop putting personal information in the dumpster where criminals can so easily obtain it."

Georgia's SB-475, which Mr. Baker championed from the beginning, makes it a crime for businesses to discard personal information unless they "shred, erase," or "modify" it first. Effective last July 1, any company in Georgia proven to have discarded personal information without first destroying it, faces up to \$10,000 in fines.

The law also acknowledges that shredding the information is the best way of safeguarding it.

According to Bob Johnson, NAID's Executive Director, "Identity theft has been on law enforcement's radar screen for the last few years because of its epidemic growth and the magnitude of the devastation it wreaks on its victims. While forty-seven states have laws making it a crime, Georgia is one of only three states that have a law to deter businesses from fueling the crime by carelessly discarding personal information."

In fact, the vast majority of states did criminalize identity theft over the last several years. However, following those initial actions to confront the crime, states like Georgia have realized a key ingredient of preventing identity theft was originally overlooked.

"There is hope that the other states will add similar provisions to their identity theft laws," says Johnson. "When Georgia originally passed its identity theft law a few years ago, it was the third state in the country to do so. Forty-four states followed suit. "Here they are again the third state to enact these necessary additional protections. It is logical to assume that the remaining states will do the same."

Another reason for states to act soon lies in the nature of the identity theft criminal network.

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“These guys move around,” said Javonye Hicks, the Assistant Attorney General responsible for prosecuting identity theft cases in Georgia. “If they can’t get away with it here, they’re going to move to other states.”

Says Johnson of why Georgia’s top law enforcement officer would take the time to address his group in the middle of a campaign, “I think Mr. Baker gave a priority to speaking with us because we have been one of the most effective messengers for these laws. Our members are out there talking to businesses everyday. We also have a keen knowledge of the lax attitude many businesses have toward their responsibility to protect personal information.”

In the last decade, shredding services have become the most commonly used method for business and government to destroy sensitive records. Johnson estimates that there are over 500 such firms and claims that the cost-savings and convenience of shredding services are the reason for their overwhelming popularity. NAID, the non-profit trade association for the shredding industry, currently represents approximately 280 member companies.

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