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Washington Courts Announce Potential Massive Data Breach

By AUSTIN JENKINS (/PEOPLE/AUSTIN-JENKINS)

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A hacking incident involving Washington's court system could affect upwards of a million people. The Administrative Office of the Courts announced that hackers breached its public website sometime last fall or early this year and social security and potentially driver license numbers were accessed.

(http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/shared/npr/201305/182684449.jpg)
Enlarge image
(http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/shared/npr/201305/182684449.jpg)
Credit Cacophony / Wikimedia

Here's what the court system has established for certain: 94 social security numbers were obtained by hackers "fishing" for personal information. Court managers won't release details about those 94 victims – however they will get a letter in the mail. An additional 160,000 social security numbers may have been compromised.

But here's the big number: Up to a million driver's license numbers could also have been accessed. This is personal data belonging to people who have been in Washington's court system – from traffic citations to superior court criminal cases.

Mike Keeling, an IT operations manager for the courts, says the hackers exploited a weakness in an Adobe software program. "It was a protected area, it was password protected, but it was an oversight on our part that it was not encrypted."

Keeling says encryption and a software patch are now in place. Washington courts first learned of the hacking incident in February after a tip. The delay in notifying the public was in part to protect a criminal investigation.

A website and hotline have been set up to answer questions from the public. The website address is: www.courts.wa.gov/databreach (http://www.courts.wa.gov/databreach) . The number to call is 1-800-448-5584.

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