

TESTIMONY

Testimony of Senator Barbara Allen

April 16, 2002

Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, Restructuring, and the District
of Columbia

"A License to Break the Law? Protecting the Integrity of Driver's
Licenses"

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the invitation to testify before you today. I became interested in the issue of identity theft last December and January when I personally became a victim of bank fraud. As I researched the issue in my own state, I was stunned to learn how easy it is to obtain fraudulent, government-issued identification in Kansas, in the form of driver's licenses and non-driver's i.d. cards.

Reports of Identity theft have increased exponentially in the United States, and in Kansas, over the last several years. American citizens, financial institutions, retailers, and credit card companies are the victims of this crime.

Today, I regret to say, Kansas is one of the easiest states in the nation in which to obtain false identification, and to steal someone's identity. There are no security measures in place to protect Kansans, to ensure the person applying for a driver's license or nondriver's i.d. card really is that person. A simple photograph yields an instant, permanent piece of government-issued identification.

Kansas currently requires a photograph, but no social security number, or fingerprint, in order to obtain a driver's license or non-driver's i.d. card. Senate Bill 559 would amend state law so that all applicants for driver's licenses and nondriver's i.d. cards would be required to submit their social security number and a biometric identifier, such as a thumbprint, to obtain identification. Applicants would receive a temporary license or i.d. card, and only after verification of the applicant's identity, would a permanent identification be issued.

The District Attorney's office in Johnson County, which is part of the greater Kansas City metropolitan area and near my senatorial district, reports cases of identity theft more than doubling every year. Identity theft cases in the city of Overland Park, where I live, have increased 100% in each of the last two years. In our county alone, this crime causes over \$1million annually in losses to retailers, credit card companies, and banks. These losses are passed on to the consumer in the form of higher costs for products and services.

The financial implications of identity theft are substantial, but they pale in comparison to the damage that can be done - including loss of life - when criminals steal our identities and use them for evil purposes on a broader scale.

An article I have attached to my testimony notes that Governor Tom Ridge, Director of the Office of Homeland Security, is encouraging governors and other state officials to take steps to improve the security and authenticity of driver's licenses. Ridge recently urged governors attending a National Governors Association meeting to draft model legislation setting standards for more secure licensing procedures. By coming up with their own procedures, Ridge said, the governors would avoid having standards forced on them by Congress.

Driver's licenses are much more than a license to drive - they allow us to open bank accounts, cash checks, write merchants checks, and step onto airplanes. They are the most widely used and accepted domestic document to verify a person's identity, but they are NOT reliable. And they won't be reliable until we strengthen the identity verification process before a license is issued.

As Americans, we have two choices. We can leave the current identification system as is - risking the personal and financial security of private citizens, the finances of the business community, and the lives of fellow Americans - or we can improve the system.

Some argue a secure personal identification system is an invasion of privacy or a limitation of personal freedom. But only those who have something to hide will lose from providing proof positive they are who they say they are. Identity cards - and that is what driver's licenses are today - should be as close to fool-proof as technology can make them to protect us. S.B. 559 is not about invading Kansans' privacy, it's about preserving Kansans' privacy, and protecting Kansans' security.

What should the role of the federal government be in enhancing the reliability and security of the driver's license system? Based on my experience in Kansas, a national i.d. card is not the answer. Perhaps the role of the federal government should be 1.) to set standards for more secure licensing procedures, and 2.) to offer financial incentives to states that take every step possible to ensure that government-issued identification is authentic. Personally, I would welcome incentives from the federal government to help convince legislators in my state it is critical we improve the security and authenticity of driver's licenses in Kansas. Many of them still don't appreciate the magnitude of this threat to our personal safety and financial security.

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I will be happy to stand for questions.

[Committee Members](#) | [Subcommittees](#) | [Hearings](#) | [Key Legislation](#) | [Jurisdiction](#)
[Press Statements](#) | [Current Issues](#) | [Video of Select Hearings](#) | [Sites of Interest](#)