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that is morally wrong.*

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JEFFERSON CITY

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## **Sen. Gibbons Protects I.D. Theft Victims' Assets *Consumer Protection Legislation Offers Credit Freeze***

JEFFERSON CITY – Assets that victims of identity theft have worked to earn will now be protected in a bill sent to the governor today. House Bill 1384, amended and handled by Senate Leader Mike Gibbons, R-Kirkwood, creates new protections to combat the growing number of identity theft victims who lose their hard-earned money and assets.

"Victims should not have to lose what they've worked their entire life to earn after being defrauded," Gibbons said. "By allowing consumers to freeze their credit, we can stop the financial hemorrhaging identity theft victims face."

The Federal Trade Commission reported 8.3 million Americans were victims of identity theft in 2005. Data shows one out of five cases were "new account fraud" where thieves steal personal information to open new accounts in their victims' names. A credit freeze on a victim's credit file prevents anyone from trying to receive credit, loans or services in their name without permission from the consumer.

The credit freezes work because most businesses will not issue new credit or provide goods and services for later payment without checking an applicant's credit history. If an individual's credit report is frozen and an imposter applies for credit in his or her name, the creditor is likely to deny the application, preventing the "new account fraud."

Alarmingly, two out of five victims report problems such as harassment by debt collectors, being unable to qualify for loans, having their utilities cut off, being subject to a criminal investigation or civil suit, and having difficulties accessing their bank accounts according to an FTC survey. "New account fraud" victims were twice as likely to encounter these problems.

Gibbons said the measure means that victims, at the first sign of identity theft, can freeze their credit by either calling or going online to protect against further fraudulent claims.

"A simple step can now save identity theft victims time, headaches and money," he said. "The ability to freeze your credit will better protect victims of identity theft from fighting for years to reverse fraudulent charges and the damage done. Plus, they will be in control, so when they are ready to make a purchase they can lift the freeze and have it cleared within 15 minutes."

Gibbons reminds consumers prevention is the best protection, such as shredding sensitive documents, keeping your Social Security number private, and refusing to give out personal information while shopping online. Federal law allows consumers one free copy annually of their credit reports.

For more information visit [www.senate.mo.gov](http://www.senate.mo.gov), keyword search "HB1384."

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