



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

August 2006

Dear Servicemember or Veteran:

I am writing to share with you the most current information regarding the theft of a laptop and a hard drive containing personal identifying data on servicemembers and veterans. You should have received a prior letter from me explaining that an employee took home electronic data from the VA, which he was not authorized to do. The data were downloaded to the hard drive. The employee's home was burglarized and the laptop and hard drive were stolen.

I am pleased to report that both the laptop and the hard drive have been recovered thanks to hardworking law enforcement officials in the local and federal communities. Based on the results of forensic tests, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has told us that they are highly confident the sensitive data were not accessed.

Given the FBI's high degree of confidence that the information was not compromised, individual credit monitoring will not be necessary. However, VA has obtained data breach analysis services as a means of further ensuring no misuse of this data occurs in the future. Data breach analysis is used to detect patterns of misuse related to a specific data loss incident. While it is highly unlikely that the data were accessed, data breach analysis will provide back-up assurances.

In addition, we encourage all servicemembers and veterans to be extra vigilant and carefully monitor their financial records. For information on how to protect yourself against identity theft, please visit the Federal Trade Commission's Web site (www.consumer.gov/idtheft) or call 1-877-438-4338.

We apologize for any concern that this situation may have caused you. Although this has been a painful lesson, it has identified gaps in VA's information security practices that we are correcting. I am committed to having our employees adequately trained, with strengthened policies and procedures in place so that this does not happen again. We are thoroughly examining every aspect of our information security program to ensure that veterans' sensitive data are not stolen or compromised. Veterans have a right to expect that VA will take all necessary precautions to safeguard their personal information. I am confident that VA will achieve the highest standards in the realm of cyber and information security, just as it has in the realm of electronic medical records and the delivery of health care to veterans. I appreciate your understanding through this difficult situation.

Even as we have been addressing this issue, VA has been attending to its core mission of caring for veterans – providing excellent health care, benefits, and burials – with no diminution of quality or commitment. For further information, please contact a Veterans Service Representative at 1-800-827-1000.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. James Nicholson".

R. James Nicholson