

Housing Authority of Thurston County
1206 12th Avenue SE
Olympia WA 98501

April 15, 2019

On March 13, 2019 the Housing Authority of Thurston County (HATC) was the victim of a crime commonly known as “Ransomware.”

HATC’s recently installed system for managing the rental assistance programs, case management, and accounting was not effected by the attack. The attack encrypted files in the legacy system and files produced in standard office software formats. Data in the files that were encrypted by the attack contain personally identifiable information, notably names and social security numbers.

We do not believe that data was acquired, disclosed, or used by unauthorized persons. However, it is impossible to affirm that belief with absolute certainty. The protection of the personal data you share with us is one of our critical responsibilities. Thus we have a responsibility to share this information with you.

Ransomware is an insidious type of malware that encrypts (locks) digital data/files on a computer or network; if successful in this effort the perpetrator then demands money from the victim to decrypt (unlock) the files. Perpetrators can be individuals, units of organized crime, or foreign governments hostile to the United States. Victims can be individuals but are increasingly health care entities, state and local governments including law enforcement agencies, and businesses of all sizes.

According to the FBI, “Ransomware attacks are not only proliferating, they’re becoming more sophisticated.” A variety of methods are used, many of which do not require the active targeting by a person to gain unauthorized access to a specific system.

The general mode of operations for Ransomware perpetrators is to quickly lock up files and then to demand money from the victim. Their typical “business model” is not to steal data for identify theft, but rather to get paid quickly by the victim to unlock files.

HATC did not contact the perpetrators. HATC did not pay ransom, extortion.

Our established digital services vendor/contractor was on-site by 9:00AM. With the contractor’s assistance, actions were taken to contain the attack and the potential of additional threats. HATC commenced normal operations that same morning.

HATC maintains a disciplined, secure data back-up procedure and system, which was critical to the prompt recovery. We are engaging the expertise of digital security experts to make additional steps to further protect HATC, its clients, and partners from the risks of this and other digital security risks.

We are sorry that this crime occurred and for the stress you may feel about this news

Again, we do not believe that data was acquired, disclosed, or used by unauthorized persons. Nonetheless in today’s environment with a multitude of efforts to misuse personal information it is always wise to be cautious

Federal law entitles you to a free annual credit report to help you monitor your report. You may be entitled to additional reports if you are a recipient of public welfare assistance. The only federally authorized site to obtain these free reports is www.annualcreditreport.com or 877-322-8228

Consumers are entitled to place fraud alerts on their credit reports if they believe they are (or about to be) fraud victims:

Equifax PO Box 740256 Atlanta, GA 30374,
800-685-1111 <https://www.equifax.com/personal/credit-report-services>

Experian PO Box 9554 Allen, TX 75013,
888-397-3742 <https://www.experian.com/fraud/center.html>

Transunion PO Box 2000 Chester, PA 19016,
888-909-8872 <https://www.transunion.com/fraud-victim-resource/place-fraud-alert>

Additional Consumer Protection information is available through the Washington State Office of the Attorney General, <https://www.atg.wa.gov/>

As always please contact us with any questions at 360-753-8292 Housing Authority of Thurston County, 1206 12th Avenue SE Olympia WA 98501



April 24, 2019

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Housing Authority of Thurston County
1206 12th Avenue SE
Olympia WA 98501
360-753-8292
Contact: Craig Chance, Executive Director
CraigC@HATC.Org**

HOUSING AUTHORITY RECOVERS FROM RANSOMWARE

On March 13, 2019 the Housing Authority of Thurston County (HATC) was the victim of a crime commonly known as “Ransomware.” Our established digital services contractor was on-site by 9:00AM. With the contractor’s assistance, actions were taken to contain the attack and the potential of additional threats. HATC commenced normal operations that same morning.

Data in the files that were encrypted by the ransomware attack contain personally identifiable information, notably names and social security numbers. HATC does not believe that data was acquired, disclosed, or used by unauthorized persons.

Ransomware is an insidious type of malware that encrypts (locks) digital data/files on a computer or network. If successful in this effort the perpetrator then demands money from the victim to decrypt (unlock) the files. Perpetrators can be individuals, units of organized crime, or foreign governments hostile to the United States. Victims can be individuals but are increasingly health care entities, state and local governments including law enforcement agencies, and businesses of all sizes.

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Information security professionals stated that the “business model” of ransomware perpetrators is not to steal data for identify theft, but rather to get paid quickly by the victim to unlock files.

HATC did not contact the perpetrators. HATC did not pay ransom, extortion

HATC maintains a disciplined, secure data back-up procedure and system, which was critical to the prompt recovery. We are engaging the expertise of information security experts to make additional steps to further protect HATC, its clients, and partners from the risks of this and other digital security risks

HATC’s recently installed system for managing the rental assistance programs, case management, and accounting was not effected by the attack. The attack encrypted files in the legacy system and files produced in standard office software formats.

HATC directly reached out to 8,312 people about the ransomware attack. This included people who receive rental assistance, are on the active waiting lists, or are individual landlords with personally identifiable information. An additional 17,045 individuals had applied to waitlists as long as fifteen years ago and HATC no longer has reliable contact information.

Again, HATC does not believe that data was acquired, disclosed, or used by unauthorized persons. Nonetheless in today’s environment with a multitude of efforts to misuse personal information it is always wise to be cautious. The Washington Attorney General and US Consumer Finance Protection Bureau websites contain security information and resources.

The Housing Authority of Thurston County is a public corporation governed by six commissioners. It serves its clients with rent subsidies, supportive services, and through its 531 below-market rate rental units. The mission is to provide decent, safe, and affordable housing to persons with disabilities, low-income, and at-risk individuals and families. The ultimate goal of the Housing Authority is to assist individuals and families to secure long term permanent housing.

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