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Statehouse Update - 1/14/2006

by Marty Ryan, Legislative Director

Eroding privacy rights

In the schools . . .

The first bill introduced in the Senate this year is a bill that will dilute one of the rare good bills enacted last year. The “Child Identification and Protection Act”, [House File 685](#), was enacted last year and prohibits the fingerprinting of children by a governmental unit except in certain circumstances and under specific conditions. [Senate File 2001](#), introduced this year, amends HF 685 by allowing school districts to “use biometric fingerprint identification systems for certain restricted purposes.”

Some school districts in Iowa have installed biometric fingerprint readers in school cafeterias to scan fingerprints of students as an alternative to lunch cards and other tracking mechanisms. System vendors and food service directors of school lunch plans claim using fingerprint-recognition systems will eliminate problems with students, such as losing lunch cards and other tangible materials for keeping track of meals purchased. Another perceived problem is the issuance of different colored lunch cards identifying students who paid cash from students who receive subsidized or free meals. There are claims that different colored cards have led to ridicule or bullying.

Biometric ID systems are used in other states to track attendance in class and track books checked out from the library. Kids don’t seem to think this is a big deal because technology is a fact of their lives. Manufacturers, vendors, cafeteria directors, and school officials claim that many of us are overreacting. This method of identification is not a fingerprint, *per se*, but a numerical image of ones and zeroes. Nonetheless, we have some problems.

There must be a backup to the original system. Fingerprint cards must be stored somewhere within the school in case the system should fail and need a reboot. It’s not practical that fingerprinting sessions be conducted all over again. Having original fingerprints cards lying around, even in a vault, creates a strong temptation for some law enforcement officers, even though we have been assured that law enforcement will not be able to access this information. (That’s next year’s legislative issue.)

The most serious concern we have is children associating fingerprints with food, attendance and books. Criminals are fingerprinted. Criminals have few privacy rights. So what message are we sending to children?

HF 685 passed the House last year by a vote of 95-3. It overwhelmingly passed the Senate 48-0. Urge your [senator](#) and [representative](#) to oppose any changes to the "Child Identification and Protection Act of 2005".

. . . in the pharmacy . . .

Round III: Last session we beat back efforts of the Board of Pharmacy Examiners to establish a prescription drug database. (See [Statehouse Update, May 10, 2005](#).) We successfully continued that defense last summer and fall as the pharmacy board attempted to implement their proposal through the rulemaking process. Now, they're coming back one more time to get their legislation passed.

Last year the pharmacy board was trying to get \$350,000 of federal funds to implement this program (with no concrete plan about how to keep the project funded long-term). Currently, the federal ante has been raised to just short of \$1,000,000. They're desperate to get their bill enacted!

Please convince your [state senator](#) and your [representative](#) that you have done nothing wrong and should not have your health and prescription information traced by the government or a 3rd party contracted by the government.

. . . and on the street

Please read the most recent edition [Dec 2005, page 2] of [The Defender](#) to become acquainted with this very important issue – The Real ID Act.

Don't know who your senator or representative might be?

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