

Senate Bill No. 168

CHAPTER 720

An act to amend Section 1785.15 of, to add Sections 1785.11.1, 1785.11.2, 1785.11.3, 1785.11.4, and 1785.11.6 to, and to add Title 1.81.1 (commencing with Section 1798.85) to Part 4 of Division 3 of, the Civil Code, relating to personal information.

[Approved by Governor October 10, 2001. Filed
with Secretary of State October 11, 2001.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 168, Bowen. Personal information: confidentiality: identity theft.

(1) The Consumer Credit Reporting Agencies Act and the federal Fair Credit Reporting Act provide for the regulation of consumer credit reporting agencies, commonly known as credit bureaus, which collect credit-related information on consumers and report this information to subscribers. The Consumer Credit Reporting Agencies Act requires certain notices and disclosures to be provided to consumers with a mailing address in California, including a requirement for providing a copy of a consumer's credit file to the consumer for a reasonable fee not exceeding \$8, and a requirement to provide a toll-free telephone number for certain purposes, including the opportunity for a consumer to elect to have his or her name removed from lists supplied to creditors that are used to make firm offers of credit, as defined, that were not initiated by the consumer.

This bill would require, beginning July 1, 2002, consumer credit reporting agencies to also accept security alerts, as defined, by written request or via a toll-free telephone number, from consumers, and would allow a consumer to request a consumer credit reporting agency to impose a security freeze on release of any information from his or her file. The bill would require a consumer credit reporting agency to place a security alert in a consumer credit report within 5 business days of receiving a request to do so and to notify persons using consumer credit reports of the existence of a security alert. The bill would require that the security alert remain in effect for at least 90 days and would allow a consumer to renew it.

The bill would also require, beginning January 1, 2003, a consumer credit reporting agency to place a security freeze, as defined, on a consumer credit report within 5 business days of receiving a request to do so in writing by certified mail, and would prohibit the release of



information from a consumer credit report while the freeze is in place, except as provided. Among other things, the bill would also require a consumer credit reporting agency to provide a consumer an identification number to be used for temporarily lifting a freeze upon a consumer credit report or authorizing the subsequent release of information from a consumer credit report that is subject to a security freeze. The bill would also provide that a security freeze shall remain in place until either the consumer requests to have the security freeze removed, or upon discovery by the consumer credit reporting agency that the consumer's credit report was frozen due to a material misrepresentation by the consumer. The bill would provide that it does not prevent a consumer credit reporting agency from charging a reasonable fee to freeze, remove a freeze, or temporarily lift a freeze regarding access to a consumer credit report.

The bill would further require, beginning January 1, 2003, that, if a security freeze is in place, a consumer credit reporting agency must provide a consumer with written confirmation within 30 days after making specified changes to information in a consumer's credit report.

This bill would also exempt specified information services companies from the requirements of placing a security alert or a security freeze. The bill would additionally exempt from its requirements certain consumer credit reporting agencies that act only as resellers of consumer credit information and that do not maintain permanent consumer credit data bases from which new credit reports are produced, but would require these consumer credit reporting agencies to honor any security freeze placed on a credit report by any other consumer credit reporting agency.

The bill would also revise the written summary of rights that a consumer credit reporting agency is required to provide to a consumer to include information about security alerts and security freezes and their consequences.

(2) Existing law provides for the use of social security numbers as a means of identification in numerous applications.

This bill would prohibit any person or entity, not including a state or local agency, as of July 1, 2002, from using an individual's social security number in certain ways, including posting it publicly or requiring it for access to products or services. This bill would provide an exception to the above-described provisions for a person or entity that meets specified conditions, but would provide that an individual may prohibit the use of his or her social security number in these circumstances by making a written request and that there may be no charge for implementing this request. This bill would also provide that its provisions do not prevent the collection, use, or retention of social security numbers as required by state or federal law, or the use of social



security numbers for internal verification or administrative purposes. The bill would exempt from its requirements certain records required to be open to the public pursuant to specified state laws. The bill would also provide that the prohibition on the use of social security numbers shall apply to providers of health care, health care service plans, licensed health care professionals, contractors, as defined, pursuant to delayed operative provisions.

(3) This bill would enact other related provisions.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 1785.11.1 is added to the Civil Code, to read:

1785.11.1. (a) A consumer may elect to place a security alert in his or her credit report by making a request in writing or by telephone to a consumer credit reporting agency. “Security alert” means a notice placed in a consumer’s credit report, at the request of the consumer, that notifies a recipient of the credit report that the consumer’s identity may have been used without the consumer’s consent to fraudulently obtain goods or services in the consumer’s name.

(b) A consumer credit reporting agency shall notify each person requesting consumer credit information with respect to a consumer of the existence of a security alert in the credit report of that consumer, regardless of whether a full credit report, credit score, or summary report is requested.

(c) Each consumer credit reporting agency shall maintain a toll-free telephone number to accept security alert requests from consumers 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

(d) The toll-free telephone number shall be included in any written disclosure by a consumer credit reporting agency to any consumer pursuant to Section 1785.15 and shall be printed in a clear and conspicuous manner.

(e) A consumer credit reporting agency shall place a security alert on a consumer’s credit report no later than five business days after receiving a request from the consumer.

(f) The security alert shall remain in place for at least 90 days, and a consumer shall have the right to request a renewal of the security alert.

SEC. 2. Section 1785.11.2 is added to the Civil Code, to read:

1785.11.2. (a) A consumer may elect to place a security freeze on his or her credit report by making a request in writing by certified mail to a consumer credit reporting agency. “Security freeze” means a notice placed in a consumer’s credit report, at the request of the consumer and subject to certain exceptions, that prohibits the consumer credit reporting agency from releasing the consumer’s credit report or any



information from it without the express authorization of the consumer. When a security freeze is in place, information from a consumer's credit report shall not be released to a third party without prior express authorization from the consumer. This subdivision does not prevent a consumer credit reporting agency from advising a third party that a security freeze is in effect with respect to the consumer's credit report.

(b) A consumer credit reporting agency shall place a security freeze on a consumer's credit report no later than five business days after receiving a written request from the consumer.

(c) The consumer credit reporting agency shall send a written confirmation of the security freeze to the consumer within 10 business days and shall provide the consumer with a unique personal identification number or password to be used by the consumer when providing authorization for the release of his or her credit for a specific party or period of time.

(d) If the consumer wishes to allow his or her credit report to be accessed for a specific party or period of time while a freeze is in place, he or she shall contact the consumer credit reporting agency, request that the freeze be temporarily lifted, and provide the following:

(1) Proper identification, as defined in subdivision (c) of Section 1785.15.

(2) The unique personal identification number or password provided by the credit reporting agency pursuant to subdivision (c).

(3) The proper information regarding the third party who is to receive the credit report or the time period for which the report shall be available to users of the credit report.

(e) A consumer credit reporting agency that receives a request from a consumer to temporarily lift a freeze on a credit report pursuant to subdivision (d), shall comply with the request no later than three business days after receiving the request.

(f) A consumer credit reporting agency may develop procedures involving the use of telephone, fax, the Internet, or other electronic media to receive and process a request from a consumer to temporarily lift a freeze on a credit report pursuant to subdivision (d) in an expedited manner.

(g) A consumer credit reporting agency shall remove or temporarily lift a freeze placed on a consumer's credit report only in the following cases:

(1) Upon consumer request, pursuant to subdivision (d) or (j).

(2) If the consumer's credit report was frozen due to a material misrepresentation of fact by the consumer. If a consumer credit reporting agency intends to remove a freeze upon a consumer's credit report pursuant to this paragraph, the consumer credit reporting agency shall



notify the consumer in writing prior to removing the freeze on the consumer's credit report.

(h) If a third party requests access to a consumer credit report on which a security freeze is in effect, and this request is in connection with an application for credit or any other use, and the consumer does not allow his or her credit report to be accessed for that specific party or period of time, the third party may treat the application as incomplete.

(i) If a consumer requests a security freeze, the consumer credit reporting agency shall disclose the process of placing and temporarily lifting a freeze, and the process for allowing access to information from the consumer's credit report for a specific party or period of time while the freeze is in place.

(j) A security freeze shall remain in place until the consumer requests that the security freeze be removed. A consumer credit reporting agency shall remove a security freeze within three business days of receiving a request for removal from the consumer, who provides both of the following:

(1) Proper identification, as defined in subdivision (c) of Section 1785.15.

(2) The unique personal identification number or password provided by the credit reporting agency pursuant to subdivision (c).

(k) A consumer credit reporting agency shall require proper identification, as defined in subdivision (c) of Section 1785.15, of the person making a request to place or remove a security freeze.

(l) The provisions of this section do not apply to the use of a consumer report by the following:

(1) A person or entity, or a subsidiary, affiliate, or agent of that person or entity, or an assignee of a financial obligation owing by the consumer to that person or entity, or a prospective assignee of a financial obligation owing by the consumer to that person or entity in conjunction with the proposed purchase of the financial obligation, with which the consumer has or had prior to assignment an account or contract, including a demand deposit account, or to whom the consumer issued a negotiable instrument, for the purposes of reviewing the account or collecting the financial obligation owing for the account, contract, or negotiable instrument. For purposes of this paragraph, "reviewing the account" includes activities related to account maintenance, monitoring, credit line increases, and account upgrades and enhancements.

(2) A subsidiary, affiliate, agent, assignee, or prospective assignee of a person to whom access has been granted under subdivision (d) of Section 1785.11.2 for purposes of facilitating the extension of credit or other permissible use.



(3) Any state or local agency, law enforcement agency, trial court, or private collection agency acting pursuant to a court order, warrant, or subpoena.

(4) A child support agency acting pursuant to Chapter 2 of Division 17 of the Family Code or Title IV-D of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. et seq.).

(5) The State Department of Health Services or its agents or assigns acting to investigate Medi-Cal fraud.

(6) The Franchise Tax Board or its agents or assigns acting to investigate or collect delinquent taxes or unpaid court orders or to fulfill any of its other statutory responsibilities.

(7) The use of credit information for the purposes of prescreening as provided for by the federal Fair Credit Reporting Act.

(m) Nothing in this act shall prevent a consumer credit reporting agency from charging a reasonable fee to a consumer who elects to freeze, remove the freeze, or temporarily lift the freeze regarding access to a consumer credit report, except that a consumer reporting agency may not charge a fee to a victim of identity theft who has submitted a valid police report or valid Department of Motor Vehicles investigative report that alleges a violation of Section 530.5 of the Penal Code.

SEC. 3. Section 1785.11.3 is added to the Civil Code, to read:

1785.11.3. (a) If a security freeze is in place, a consumer credit reporting agency shall not change any of the following official information in a consumer credit report without sending a written confirmation of the change to the consumer within 30 days of the change being posted to the consumer's file: name, date of birth, social security number, and address. Written confirmation is not required for technical modifications of a consumer's official information, including name and street abbreviations, complete spellings, or transposition of numbers or letters. In the case of an address change, the written confirmation shall be sent to both the new address and to the former address.

(b) If a consumer has placed a security alert, a consumer credit reporting agency shall provide the consumer, upon request, with a free copy of his or her credit report at the time the 90-day security alert period expires.

SEC. 4. Section 1785.11.4 is added to the Civil Code, to read:

1785.11.4. The provisions of Sections 1785.11.1, 1785.11.2, and 1785.11.3 do not apply to a consumer credit reporting agency that acts only as a reseller of credit information pursuant to Section 1785.22 by assembling and merging information contained in the data base of another consumer credit reporting agency or multiple consumer credit reporting agencies, and does not maintain a permanent data base of credit information from which new consumer credit reports are produced.



However, a consumer credit reporting agency acting pursuant to Section 1785.22 shall honor any security freeze placed on a consumer credit report by another consumer credit reporting agency.

SEC. 5. Section 1785.11.6 is added to the Civil Code, to read:

1785.11.6. The following entities are not required to place in a credit report either a security alert, pursuant to Section 1785.11.1, or a security freeze, pursuant to Section 1785.11.2:

(a) A check services company, which issues authorizations for the purpose of approving or processing negotiable instruments, electronic funds transfers, or similar methods of payments.

(b) A demand deposit account information service company, which issues reports regarding account closures due to fraud, substantial overdrafts, ATM abuse, or similar negative information regarding a consumer, to inquiring banks or other financial institutions for use only in reviewing a consumer request for a demand deposit account at the inquiring bank or financial institution.

SEC. 6. Section 1785.15 of the Civil Code is amended to read:

1785.15. (a) A consumer credit reporting agency shall supply files and information required under Section 1785.10 during normal business hours and on reasonable notice. In addition to the disclosure provided by this chapter and any disclosures received by the consumer, the consumer has the right to request and receive all of the following:

(1) Either a decoded written version of the file or a written copy of the file, including all information in the file at the time of the request, with an explanation of any code used.

(2) A credit score for the consumer, the key factors, and the related information, as defined in and required by Section 1785.15.1.

(3) A record of all inquiries, by recipient, which result in the provision of information concerning the consumer in connection with a credit transaction that is not initiated by the consumer and which were received by the consumer credit reporting agency in the 12-month period immediately preceding the request for disclosure under this section.

(4) The recipients, including end users specified in Section 1785.22, of any consumer credit report on the consumer which the consumer credit reporting agency has furnished:

(A) For employment purposes within the two-year period preceding the request.

(B) For any other purpose within the 12-month period preceding the request.

Identification for purposes of this paragraph shall include the name of the recipient or, if applicable, the fictitious business name under which the recipient does business disclosed in full. If requested by the



consumer, the identification shall also include the address of the recipient.

(b) Files maintained on a consumer shall be disclosed promptly as follows:

(1) In person, at the location where the consumer credit reporting agency maintains the trained personnel required by subdivision (d), if he or she appears in person and furnishes proper identification.

(2) By mail, if the consumer makes a written request with proper identification for a copy of the file or a decoded written version of that file to be sent to the consumer at a specified address. A disclosure pursuant to this paragraph shall be deposited in the United States mail, postage prepaid, within five business days after the consumer's written request for the disclosure is received by the consumer credit reporting agency. Consumer credit reporting agencies complying with requests for mailings under this section shall not be liable for disclosures to third parties caused by mishandling of mail after the mailings leave the consumer reporting agencies.

(3) A summary of all information contained in files on a consumer and required to be provided by Section 1785.10 shall be provided by telephone, if the consumer has made a written request, with proper identification for telephone disclosure.

(4) Information in a consumer's file required to be provided in writing under this section may also be disclosed in another form if authorized by the consumer and if available from the consumer credit reporting agency. For this purpose a consumer may request disclosure in person pursuant to Section 1785.10, by telephone upon disclosure of proper identification by the consumer, by electronic means if available from the consumer credit reporting agency, or by any other reasonable means that is available from the consumer credit reporting agency.

(c) "Proper identification," as used in subdivision (b) means that information generally deemed sufficient to identify a person. Only if the consumer is unable to reasonably identify himself or herself with the information described above, may a consumer credit reporting agency require additional information concerning the consumer's employment and personal or family history in order to verify his or her identity.

(d) The consumer credit reporting agency shall provide trained personnel to explain to the consumer any information furnished him or her pursuant to Section 1785.10.

(e) The consumer shall be permitted to be accompanied by one other person of his or her choosing, who shall furnish reasonable identification. A consumer credit reporting agency may require the consumer to furnish a written statement granting permission to the



consumer credit reporting agency to discuss the consumer's file in that person's presence.

(f) Any written disclosure by a consumer credit reporting agency to any consumer pursuant to this section shall include a written summary of all rights the consumer has under this title and in the case of a consumer credit reporting agency which compiles and maintains consumer credit reports on a nationwide basis, a toll-free telephone number which the consumer can use to communicate with the consumer credit reporting agency. The written summary of rights required under this subdivision is sufficient if in substantially the following form:

“You have a right to obtain a copy of your credit file from a consumer credit reporting agency. You may be charged a reasonable fee not exceeding eight dollars (\$8). There is no fee, however, if you have been turned down for credit, employment, insurance, or a rental dwelling because of information in your credit report within the preceding 60 days. The consumer credit reporting agency must provide someone to help you interpret the information in your credit file.

You have a right to dispute inaccurate information by contacting the consumer credit reporting agency directly. However, neither you nor any credit repair company or credit service organization has the right to have accurate, current, and verifiable information removed from your credit report. Under the Federal Fair Credit Reporting Act, the consumer credit reporting agency must remove accurate, negative information from your report only if it is over seven years old. Bankruptcy information can be reported for 10 years.

If you have notified a consumer credit reporting agency in writing that you dispute the accuracy of information in your file, the consumer credit reporting agency must then, within 30 business days, reinvestigate and modify or remove inaccurate information. The consumer credit reporting agency may not charge a fee for this service. Any pertinent information and copies of all documents you have concerning an error should be given to the consumer credit reporting agency.

If reinvestigation does not resolve the dispute to your satisfaction, you may send a brief statement to the consumer credit reporting agency to keep in your file, explaining why you think the record is inaccurate. The consumer credit reporting agency must include your statement about disputed information in a report it issues about you.

You have a right to receive a record of all inquiries relating to a credit transaction initiated in 12 months preceding your request. This record shall include the recipients of any consumer credit report.

You may request in writing that the information contained in your file not be provided to a third party for marketing purposes.



You have a right to place a “security alert” in your credit report, which will warn anyone who receives information in your credit report that your identity may have been used without your consent and that recipients of your credit report are advised, but not required, to verify your identity prior to issuing credit. The security alert may prevent credit, loans, and services from being approved in your name without your consent. However, you should be aware that taking advantage of this right may delay or interfere with the timely approval of any subsequent request or application you make regarding a new loan, credit, mortgage, insurance, rental housing, employment, investment, license, cellular phone, utilities, digital signature, Internet credit card transaction, or other services, including an extension of credit at point of sale. If you place a security alert on your credit report, you have a right to obtain a free copy of your credit report at the time the 90-day security alert period expires. A security alert may be requested by calling the following toll-free telephone number: (Insert applicable toll-free telephone number).

You have a right to place a “security freeze” on your credit report, which will prohibit a consumer credit reporting agency from releasing any information in your credit report without your express authorization. A security freeze must be requested in writing by certified mail. The security freeze is designed to prevent credit, loans, and services from being approved in your name without your consent. However, you should be aware that using a security freeze to take control over who gets access to the personal and financial information in your credit report may delay, interfere with, or prohibit the timely approval of any subsequent request or application you make regarding a new loan, credit, mortgage, insurance, government services or payments rental housing, employment, investment, license, cellular phone, utilities, digital signature, Internet credit card transaction, or other services, including an extension of credit at point of sale. When you place a security freeze on your credit report, you will be provided a personal identification number or password to use if you choose to remove the freeze on your credit report or authorize the release of your credit report for a specific party or period of time after the freeze is in place. To provide that authorization you must contact the consumer credit reporting agency and provide all of the following:

- (1) The personal identification number or password.
- (2) Proper identification to verify your identity.
- (3) The proper information regarding the third party who is to receive the credit report or the period of time for which the report shall be available.



A consumer credit reporting agency must authorize the release of your credit report no later than three business days after receiving the above information.

A security freeze does not apply to a person or entity, or its affiliates, or collection agencies acting on behalf of the person or entity, with which you have an existing account, that requests information in your credit report for the purposes of reviewing or collecting the account. Reviewing the account includes activities related to account maintenance, monitoring, credit line increases, and account upgrades and enhancements.

You have a right to bring civil action against anyone, including a consumer credit reporting agency, who improperly obtains access to a file, knowingly or willfully misuses file data, or fails to correct inaccurate file data.”

SEC. 7. Title 1.81.1 (commencing with Section 1798.85) is added to Part 4 of Division 3 of the Civil Code, to read:

TITLE 1.81.1. CONFIDENTIALITY OF SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS

1798.85. (a) A person or entity, not including a state or local agency, shall not do any of the following:

(1) Publicly post or publicly display in any manner an individual’s social security number. “Publicly post” or “publicly display” means to intentionally communicate or otherwise make available to the general public.

(2) Print an individual’s social security number on any card required for the individual to access products or services provided by the person or entity.

(3) Require an individual to transmit his or her social security number over the Internet unless the connection is secure or the social security number is encrypted.

(4) Require an individual to use his or her social security number to access an Internet Web site, unless a password or unique personal identification number or other authentication device is also required to access the Web site.

(5) Print an individual’s social security number on any materials that are mailed to the individual, unless state or federal law requires the social security number to be on the document to be mailed. Notwithstanding this provision, applications and forms sent by mail may include social security numbers.

(b) Except as provided in subdivision (c), subdivision (a) applies only to the use of social security numbers on or after July 1, 2002.



(c) Except as provided in subdivision (f), a person or entity, not including a state or local agency, that has used, prior to July 1, 2002, an individual's social security number in a manner inconsistent with subdivision (a), may continue using that individual's social security number in that manner on or after July 1, 2002, if all of the following conditions are met:

(1) The use of the social security number is continuous. If the use is stopped for any reason, subdivision (a) shall apply.

(2) The individual is provided an annual disclosure, commencing in the year 2002, that informs the individual that he or she has the right to stop the use of his or her social security number in a manner prohibited by subdivision (a).

(3) A written request by an individual to stop the use of his or her social security number in a manner prohibited by subdivision (a) shall be implemented within 30 days of the receipt of the request. There shall be no fee or charge for implementing the request.

(4) A person or entity, not including a state or local agency, shall not deny services to an individual because the individual makes a written request pursuant to this subdivision.

(d) This section does not prevent the collection, use, or release of a social security number as required by state or federal law or the use of a social security number for internal verification or administrative purposes.

(e) This section does not apply to documents that are recorded or required to be open to the public pursuant to Chapter 3.5 (commencing with Section 6250), Chapter 14 (commencing with Section 7150) or Chapter 14.5 (commencing with Section 7220) of Division 7 of Title 1 of, or Chapter 9 (commencing with Section 54950) of Part 1 of Division 2 of Title 5 of, the Government Code. This section does not apply to records that are required by statute, case law, or California Rule of Court, to be made available to the public by entities provided for in Article VI of the California Constitution.

(f) (1) In the case of a health care service plan, a provider of health care, an insurer or a pharmacy benefits manager, or a contractor as defined in Section 56.05, this section shall become operative in the following manner:

(A) On or before January 1, 2003, the entities listed in paragraph (1) of subdivision (f) shall comply with paragraphs (1), (3), (4), and (5) of subdivision (a) as these requirements pertain to individual policyholders.

(B) On or before January 1, 2004, the entities listed in paragraph (1) of subdivision (f) shall comply with paragraphs (1) to (5), inclusive, of subdivision (a) as these requirements pertain to new individual



policyholders and new employer groups issued on or after January 1, 2004.

(C) On or before July 1, 2004, the entities listed in paragraph (1) of subdivision (f) shall comply with paragraphs (1) to (5), inclusive, of subdivision (a) for all policyholders and for all enrollees of the Healthy Families and Medi-Cal programs, except that individual and employer group policyholders in existence prior to January 1, 2004, shall comply upon their renewal date, but no later than July 1, 2005.

(2) A health care service plan, a provider of health care, an insurer or a pharmacy benefits manager, or a contractor shall make reasonable efforts to cooperate, through systems testing and other means, to ensure that the requirements of this article are implemented on or before the dates specified in this section.

(3) Notwithstanding paragraph (2), the Director of the Department of Managed Health Care, pursuant to the authority granted under Section 1346 of the Health and Safety Code, or the Insurance Commissioner, pursuant to the authority granted under Section 12921 of the Insurance Code, and upon a determination of good cause, may grant extensions not to exceed six months for compliance by health care service plans and insurers with the requirements of this section when requested by the health care service plan or insurer. Any extension granted shall apply to the health care service plan or insurer's affected providers, pharmacy benefits manager, and contractors.

(g) If a federal law takes effect requiring the United States Department of Health and Human Services to establish a national unique patient health identifier program, a provider of health care, a health care service plan, a licensed health care professional, or a contractor, as those terms are defined in Section 56.05, that complies with the federal law shall be deemed in compliance with this section.

SEC. 8. Section 1 of this act shall become operative on July 1, 2002. Sections 2 and 3 of this act shall become operative on January 1, 2003.

