



News Release

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Clerk of Courts Greg Hartmann Protects Citizen Privacy By Suspending Public Internet Access To Court Documents

Securing Information Is Top Priority

CINCINNATI --- Hamilton County Clerk of Courts Greg Hartmann today took proactive measures to ensure that private information is kept from remote public viewing by suspending public access to court documents via the Clerk of Courts' website. This creates a balance between the important goal of providing convenient access to public records and the necessity of reducing the risk of identity theft by protecting private information. All other features and services of the Clerk of Courts' award-winning website are still available at www.courtclerk.org.

Hartmann has made protecting personal information a top priority since taking office. In 2004, he convened a broad-based, bi-partisan task force to recommend safeguards to protect personal information while still maintaining access to public records.

Based on the recommendations of the Privacy Task Force, Hartmann blocked public Internet access to court documents that routinely contain social security numbers, most domestic relations records, and all documents known by the Clerk's office to contain sensitive information such as child custody records, bank account numbers, and child victims' names.

The task was immense. The Clerk of Courts website contains nearly 12 million documents for a total of about 24 million pages scanned and stored in the Clerk's databases. The website, a national model, had more than 13 million hits last month alone and averages over 400,000 hits a day. To date, almost 2 million documents and close to 3.5 million pages have already been blocked from Internet display.

To verify that the recommendations set forth by the Privacy Task Force adequately protected personal information, Hartmann recently performed an internal audit of the records available on the website. While the results of the audit showed that the earlier protective measures had blocked access to nearly all of the documents containing private information, Hartmann remained unsatisfied with the results.

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“I’m glad my office website helps thousands of citizens everyday but my top priority must be to protect the privacy of Ohioans,” Hartmann said. “Suspending public Internet access to court records, while we analyze the data, is a critical step in achieving that goal.”

Once all the court records have been screened for sensitive information, the suspension will be lifted. Full public access to court records is still readily available to those who visit the Courthouse.

In addition to the suspension of public Internet access to court records, Hartmann is also working with the Hamilton County Courts to determine and implement best practices that limit the inclusion of sensitive information in court records before they are filed and become public records.

“As Ohioans begin to expect public record access through the Internet, government offices must craft solutions that will preserve the security of private information while still allowing advances in technology to increase convenience and efficiency,” Hartmann concluded. “My actions today meet that challenge, but we will continue to find ways to offer even more protections.”



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Background

Below is the list of record types blocked from Internet display prior to the suspension of public Internet access to court records.

1. Traffic Tickets, criminal warrants and police referral records containing Social Security Numbers and other identifying information.
2. Bond Information Sheets that contain surety information.
3. Applications for Civil Protection Orders that are pending until a final order is granted.
4. Domestic Relations filings other than the complaint, answer, and decree.
5. Domestic Relations Family Files.
6. Information regarding jurors, victims, and children.
7. Personal financial information about individuals offered by counsel for separate filings that are not otherwise sealed.
8. Personal Physical Health or Mental Health information about individuals offered by counsel for separate filing that are not otherwise sealed.
9. Search Warrants and Affidavits in support thereof.
10. Transcripts prepared for appeal or of depositions prepared for trial.
11. Trial exhibits held in the custody of the official Court Reporter.