



An Update on Recent EBT Fraud Activity

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This is a national, regional, and local issue with evidence of heightened activity across the country and, we have seen an uptick in activity here in Rhode Island in the last week or two of skimming activity involving EBT benefits.

Please note: *this current matter is part of an ongoing investigation and may limit the amount of details the RI Department of Human Services (DHS) is able to provide. With that in mind, DHS is working with all related state agencies, law enforcement, and anyone adversely affected through this criminal activity. DHS realizes the significant impact this is having on those affected, especially as we approach the holidays. DHS is reaching out directly to those who have been affected to provide additional information and support, and is working to provide possible reimbursements through distribution of new funds or other alternatives such as gift cards. More details on this will be provided early next week.*

What has actually happened? The cases have largely been targeted through skimming. This is a process where a device that looks nearly identical to a credit card machine is attached to a store checkout payment machine. When the customer swipes their card, they are unknowingly swiping through the skimming device. This is how the scammers obtain access to account information.

How many people have been impacted? Approximately 100 accounts have been impacted, primarily beneficiaries of Rhode Island Works and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The average loss is approximately \$500. We are also concerned that the scammers who have obtained account information might wait until the beginning of the month, when funds are deposited, to access these accounts.

Where is this happening specifically? It is not uncommon to see some examples of benefit fraud from time-to-time. However, what we have seen recently is a concerted effort. The nature of the fraud is such that it allows the scammers to move their focus quickly across cities and towns. With that in mind, we are seeing incidents statewide with a focus often on major retailers/Big Box stores.

What is DHS doing about this? DHS is working closely with the Department of Administration's Office of Internal Audit, Fraud Detection, and Prevention Unit, who are also working with the USDA's Office of Inspector General. Some customers affected have

also filed individual police reports. DHS is currently working to connect directly with everyone who has been impacted – had benefits stolen or their EBT cards have been compromised (pin/account number obtained). Staff is working to provide new cards to these individuals. New cards can be issued the same day.

How can affected individuals file a fraud report? We would ask that anyone who has been affected to contact the DOA's Office of Internal Audit, Fraud Detection and Prevention by calling 401.574.8175 or visiting <https://omb.ri.gov/internal-audit/fraud-hotline> to file a report. When calling, you will be asked to leave a voicemail message.

Can individuals get stolen benefits refunded? DHS is actively working to explore possible reimbursements and alternatives such as gift cards as a means of repayment. We will have additional updates on this next week.

Protecting your PIN and taking other precautions. Please do not share your PIN. Change your PIN frequently and check your account balance frequently. If you need assistance changing your PIN, call **ebtEdge at 1-888-979-9939**. When you call, enter your card number at the prompt, listen to your balance, and after that message plays you will be directed to the main menu and receive a prompt for the pin change option. You can also log on to your account at www.ebtedge.com or use the ebtEdge mobile app to change your PIN. Also, watch out for ATMs and store payment terminals that look like they have been tampered with. Keep an eye out for overlay devices that can be attached to keypads, card readers, and credit card machines.