

OPENING STATEMENT

I want to begin by thanking Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Coburn for holding this hearing and for permitting me to attend as I am not a member of this subcommittee. As the number of cyber attacks on federal government networks continues to increase, it is important that we review agency compliance with the laws in place to prevent those attacks such as FISMA and if they need to be strengthened.

One area of concern I have is what the federal government is doing to fulfill its responsibility in maintaining and protecting sensitive Personally Identifiable Information (PII) that Americans are required to provide for a wide array of reasons, including paying taxes, receiving medical and disability benefits, and obtaining retirement compensation. This PII includes names, addresses, Social Security numbers, biometric records, and other data that is linked or linkable to an individual. Identity theft and fraud are national problems that affect approximately 10 million Americans each year so it is critical the federal government take steps to ensure PII does not fall into the wrong hands.

In the wake of the VA data breach in 2006, I asked GAO to conduct a government-wide review of current policies on the books to protect American's personal information held by government agencies. The findings released in this report are very troubling – seeming to indicate that agency after agency is failing to make securing citizens' personal information a high priority.

As a result of this GAO Report, Senator Collins and I sent a letter to every Agency requesting in writing a timeline of when they will meet the recommendations put in place by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for increased cyber-security. I want to thank the VA who has responded and indicated they are compliant or have achieved significant milestones with the OMB memoranda. I also want to thank USAID who has responded and offered details for compliance. I look forward to receiving responses from other agencies as well so we can get an accurate picture of where things stand.

The fact is the clock is ticking and we need to know when the agencies are going to have the protections in place to stop the numerous data breaches we have seen over the past few years. Our citizens deserve nothing less. The bottom line is the federal government has a responsibility to ensure the personal information it collects from its citizens is properly secured and protected. The sooner the federal government acts, the sooner Americans will be protected from the damaging consequences these breaches can have on their personal lives.