



Senator Feinstein Praises House for Passage of Bill  
To Increase Penalties for Identity Theft Crimes  
June 23, 2004

**Washington, DC** – The U.S. House of Representatives today passed legislation to increase penalties for identity theft, which is similar to a bill introduced by U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) that the Senate has passed.

**“The epidemic of identity theft must be stopped and this legislation takes a big step towards making that happen,”** Senator Feinstein said. **“Prosecutors should have the tools they need to punish those who steal identities as a means to committing other serious crimes, such as acts of terrorism or murder.”**

Senator Feinstein is the sponsor of similar legislation in the Senate, which was approved on March 19, 2003. The new House version of this bill will now go back to the Senate for passage before President Bush can sign it into law.

Both versions of the bill, which were developed in coordination with the Justice Department, would impose tougher penalties on identity thieves and make it easier for prosecutors to target those identity thieves who steal for the purpose of committing the most serious crimes, including terrorism.

**“I am very pleased that both the Senate and the House of Representatives have now passed versions of this legislation,”** Senator Feinstein said. **“The changes made to the bill by the House of Representatives are good ones – they maintain the intent of the bill and strengthen it as well. It is my hope that the Senate will quickly pass this newly modified bill, and that President Bush will then sign it into law soon so that these egregious crimes can be suitably punished.”**

According to the Federal Trade Commission, there were 214,905 victims of identity theft in the U.S. during 2003, up sharply from 161,836 in 2002 and 86,212 in 2001. Of last year’s victims, 39,452 were Californians, giving California the third-highest per capita rate of identity theft of any state. The Federal Trade Commission estimates that identity thefts cost U.S. businesses and consumers over \$50 billion last year.

Both the House and Senate versions of the bill would:

- **Increases penalties by two years** for anyone who commits “aggravated identity theft” in order to commit other serious Federal offenses, known as predicate crimes, such as immigration violations, false citizenship crimes, and firearms offenses; and
- **Increases penalties by five years** for anyone who commits identity theft for the purpose of

committing a terrorist act.

In addition to these provisions, the House version of the bill would:

- Add as a predicate crime the theft of federal funds, the theft or embezzlement of bank funds, the improper receipt of Social Security benefits, and the improper receipt of Supplemental Security Insurance benefits;
- Allow the aggregate value of stolen federal funds to be combined for felony prosecution in appropriate cases;
- Direct the Sentencing Commission to amend its guidelines in order to punish insider offenses that involve an “abuse of trust” of the offender’s position; and
- Authorize \$2 million each year for fiscal years 2005 to 2009 to the Department of Justice for the investigation and prosecution of identity theft and related credit card and other fraud cases.

###