

County to provide credit monitoring service for those affected by information release

By Catherine Dominguez, cdominguez@hcnonline.com Published 6:04 pm, Tuesday, March 27, 2018



Photo: Jason Fochtman, Staff Photographer

Montgomery County Attorney J D Lambright addresses measures the county can take to help protect employees and former employees whose personal information was compromised following a document release during a Montgomery County Commissioners Court meeting at the Alan B. Sadler Commissioners County Building, Tuesday, March 29, 2018, in Conroe.

Montgomery County commissioners on Tuesday approved a plan to pay for credit monitoring service for 70 employees whose personal information was released by County Treasurer Stephanie Davenport's office March 8.

According to County Attorney J D Lambright, a total of 79 people were affected by the release of information; however, nine of them are deceased. Of the remaining 70 individuals, 58 are current employees and 12 are former employees. Most of the current employees are law enforcement personnel, Lambright said.

The plan will cover the monitoring service for a year at a cost up to \$400. Lambright said the employees would determine what service they want and the county would pay that cost up front as long as the current and former employees provide proof they did set up monitoring. If they have not, they will be responsible for returning that money to the county. Additionally, Lambright said, as part of the plan, those employees must release the county from any liability related to the release of their information.

The court first considered reimbursing employees for the service, but some commissioners were concerned some of those affected may not be able to pay for the service up front.

The court discussed the issue during its March 20 meeting in executive session but took no action. Noack, who walked out of that executive session stating he did not want to be a part of a discussion he believed should be done in open session, placed the item on Tuesday's agenda. Davenport and Deputy Treasurer Judy Tarango were in the executive session with commissioners. Once Davenport and Tarango left the closed session, Noack rejoined the commissioners for the remaining discussion behind closed doors.

Before the closed session, Noack asked for the court to remove the item from the executive session and discuss it in open session. However, Lambright told the court due to the way the item was placed on the court agenda, they would need to meeting in closed session. But Lambright did say the court was free to discuss the issue in public after the executive session.

However, that did not happen. After the lengthy closed session, the court took no action and had no discussion before adjourning the regular meeting, leaving the vulnerability of those 79 current and former employees' private information up in the air.

The issue centers around Davenport's release of her department's procedure manual following an open records request from challenger Melanie Bush in the March 6 Republican primary election. After delaying the release almost three months, Davenport finally released the documents March 8 at the direction of the state Attorney General's Office, but she did not redact some personal information of those 79 current and former county employees.

Of the dozens of names, some of the documents show the entire Social Security number, date of birth and names of 16 people. The remaining names have the Social Security number partially redacted. In the release of the documents, the list of names, Social Security numbers and birth dates appears four separated times in the hundreds of pages released.

Lambright said his office has contacted all 70 individuals affected by the release.