

**Subcommittee on Social Security and Family Policy
of the Committee on Finance**

***Protecting the Social Security Number: An Issue of Privacy or Security? and S.
848: The Social Security Number Misuse Prevention Act of 2001***

OPENING STATEMENT

Good afternoon. I would like to thank all of you for attending today's hearing. I would also like to thank all the witnesses for being here, in particular Senator Feinstein for making the time to testify before the Subcommittee. As witnesses, your testimony will greatly assist this Subcommittee and the Congress in determining how best to address the vital issues raised today.

Today, we will examine a subject that many Americans know very little about. Identity theft is one of the more insidious forms of white collar crime in that its victims rarely even know that a crime has even been committed against them. Identity theft is generally defined as "theft or fraud that involves 'stealing' another person's personal identifying information, such as a Social Security number, date of birth or mother's maiden name in order to fraudulently establish credit, incur debt, take over financial accounts or other criminal endeavors." The prevalence of identity theft in our nation is growing rapidly and needs to be addressed. At the heart of identity theft is the theft and misuse of Social Security numbers. It is the theft and misuse of Social Security numbers that we are here to examine today.

The general public needs to be more aware of this silent, often unnoticed crime. My hope is that through hearings such as this, the Congress will be able to show citizens how better to protect themselves and their personal information from identity thieves, while also developing concrete solutions to address this problem.

Any solutions that are developed to address the theft and misuse of Social Security numbers and the ensuing identity theft must be a collaborative effort between the Congress, government agencies on the federal, state and local levels and private industry. I think it is clear that we have much work to do and I am looking forward to hearing from our witnesses.