

NAPBS Position: Availability of Identifiers in Public Records

The National Association of Professional Background Screeners (NAPBS) believes efforts to remove identifiers from public records due to concerns over identity theft are not only unwarranted but have unintended negative consequences. It is crucial that certain personal identifiers, such as full address and complete dates of birth, be available to ensure accuracy and safety.

Access to accurate identifying information leads to greater safety

Without identifying information, including full address and complete dates of birth, background screening reports cannot be as comprehensive and thus cannot be as effective promoting safety in our communities. With limited identifiers available, background screeners can either provide a report that includes a long list of criminal records based on the limited identifiers available and risk that most of the records will not belong to the applicant being screened, or can choose not to include any of the records with limited identifiers — even though the record (or records) may very well belong to the applicant. Neither result is good public policy, and both results can be avoided by making identifiers reasonably available on public records.

Redaction of identifiers can impact the ability to ensure data is matched to the right individual

Having an individual's complete date of birth in public record data helps ensure they are matched with the correct data. Full date of birth containing date, month and year, is the most commonly used identifier to distinguish between people sharing the same name to decide if a record belongs to an applicant. Address information is another tool used by background screeners to confirm or refute that a record matches an applicant. With thousands of individuals sharing the same name, date of birth and address information are critical to the process.

Redaction of identifiers leads to unnecessary delays and increased costs

Without important identifying information, the ability of background screeners to obtain the critical information needed to prepare accurate and timely consumer reports is greatly hindered. Employers, landlords and volunteer organizations depend on these reports to make informed placement decisions. The result of redacting identifiers is at best a delay in hiring, volunteering, or leasing decisions. At worst the applicant may lose out on the job, volunteer opportunity, or the lease to another individual while the search for identifiers to confirm or refute that a record matches the applicant is ongoing.

NAPBS members operate under strict training and regulations about identifiers

NAPBS members are subject to strict regulations under the Fair Credit Reporting Act and the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act of 2003 and are trained to properly handle sensitive information including personally identifiable information. Our members are also regulated by a patchwork of federal, state and local rules pertaining to data security and privacy. Finally, our members' customers have the ability to hold them to standards that frequently exceed those imposed by law.