On September 20, 2007, Iron Mountain Incorporated, the state’s contractor for data storage, informed the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA) that it had lost some of this agency’s backup media on the morning of September 19, 2007. The lost media includes some personal data on residents of the State of Louisiana, many of whom are past or present students at our postsecondary institutions. This sensitive data includes loan extract data for all loans guaranteed by this agency, START Saving Program data on account owners and beneficiaries, and scholarship and state grant data that includes FAFSA and ACT records.

After receiving the notice of the breach of security, the proper authorities were notified and an investigation was launched. To date, the data has not been recovered. The data is compressed and requires special software, specific computer equipment and sophisticated computer skills to access it. We have no reason to believe that the information has been accessed, that it has been misused in any way or that it will be misused.

The intent of this letter is to apprise you of the current situation and to enlist your aid in relaying information to your students. LOSFA is taking all steps necessary to inform affected individuals of the potential risk of identity theft and to advise on ways to protect their privacy. While the lost data is not easily read and the potential risk is minimal, the risk is nonetheless real.

We have contracted with Identity Theft Resource Center (ITRC), a nationally recognized and respected non-profit organization that specializes in best practices for identity theft detection, fraud reduction and mitigation. In addition to the information we are providing affected individuals, ITRC advises that there are certain precautions everyone should take to protect themselves from identity theft. ITRC has provided the enclosed information for you to distribute to your staff and students so they can protect themselves.

LOSFA has also established a website, www.osfa.la.gov/notice.htm which will allow staff and students to determine if their data was a part of the lost media. Individuals who determine that their information was potentially exposed will be provided additional steps to protect themselves. They will also be provided access to a call center (1-800-645-7990) to assist them with questions and instructions regarding this data breach.

While this event is regrettable, remote data storage is mandatory to ensure business continuity in the event of a catastrophic event. LOSFA is currently investigating more secure avenues to prevent and/or further mitigate this type of occurrence.