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Maurice Vellacott, MP
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Vellacott, who was recently a victim of identity theft and fraud, says it's high time to address the issue

For Immediate Release

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OTTAWA – Yesterday, Justice Minister Rob Nicholson, on behalf of the Conservative Government of Canada, announced legislation to help combat the complex and serious problem of identity theft in Canada.

Maurice Vellacott, the Member of Parliament for Saskatoon-Wanuskewin had identity theft and fraud perpetrated against him by an individual who will probably never be apprehended. The fraudster who stole Vellacott's identity, ran up a bill of over \$6,000 in products and phone services from Bell before Bell stepped in to halt the escalating debt. Vellacott reports the shock of first finding this out when he had a bill collection agency pursuing him for payment of products and services the fraudster had acquired in his name.

After a number of frustrating conversations, he convinced the bill collecting agency that he had never acquired the products, had never lived in Gatineau, Quebec, and had never worked for Health Canada.

Subsequently, Vellacott spent hours and hours over several weeks and months to deal with the personal fall-out from the fraudster's activities. In addition, Vellacott filed lengthy reports with the RCMP Phone Busters, and the Ottawa police.

Vellacott felt that Bell Canada was negligent in allowing their Bell agents to sell products and services without any face-to-face interaction with the fraudster and without requiring any hard copy identification. The Bell telephone products and services were acquired by email exchange.

Vellacott asked Bell to take disciplinary action against the representative who was negligent and highly irresponsible in selling the Bell products and services to a person through a couple of email exchanges. Vellacott is not aware if Bell took any disciplinary action. Bell approached the issue as an internal investigation and was not initially willing to provide the relevant records to the Ottawa police.

Vellacott has had police indicate to him that sometimes police investigators are stymied by companies who stone-wall when asked to turn over information on specific fraud cases.

Vellacott says that the identity theft and fraud was committed against him, whereas Bell viewed it as a fraud against them. Bell wrote it off as a corporate loss and was not going to pursue the matter further until Vellacott pressed and prodded them to at a minimum cooperate with the Ottawa police investigators.

Vellacott indicates that businesses need to be more careful to verify and protect consumer's personal information because of modern technology which is changing the criminal landscape, with new and rapidly-evolving technologies making identity theft easier than ever. Vellacott says that as a result, this problem has been an increasing threat for Canadians.

This new legislation introduced by the Conservative Government will aim to protect Canadians from identity theft by giving police the tools they need to stop this activity before the damage is done.

The proposed legislation would create three new offences directly targeting aspects of the identity theft problem, all subject to five-year maximum sentences:

- obtaining or possessing identity information with intent to use it to commit certain crimes;
- trafficking in identity information with knowledge of or recklessness as to its intended use in the commission of certain crime;
- unlawfully possessing and trafficking in government-issued identity documents.

The use of identity information of another person, generally referred to as identity fraud, is covered by current offences in the Criminal Code, such as impersonation and forgery. But identity theft, the preparatory steps of collecting, possessing or trafficking in identity information, is generally not captured by existing offences.

The Conservative Government indicates it believes that Canadians are entitled to have their identities and their valuable information protected to the highest degree possible, and these amendments are crucial if Canadians are to be protected properly.

Vellacott says, "It's high time to protect individual Canadians and businesses from identity theft fraudsters."