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Alabama Department of REHABILITATION SERVICES



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COMMISSIONER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Public Notice

*Notification of Breach of Unsecured Protected Health Information
(In accordance with 45 C.F.R. § 164-406, Notification to the media)*

(Montgomery, AL) - On November 29, 2021, the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) became aware of a possible breach of personal information from three unsecured hearing-screening devices that were no longer in use by its Children's Rehabilitation Service (CRS): one used in Montgomery and two used in Huntsville.

The hearing-screening devices formally used by CRS for pediatric hearing-screening referrals were sent to the Alabama Department of Economic Development and Community Affairs' (ADECA) Surplus Property Division for disposition, as per state policy, and then sold. The device once used in Montgomery was then purchased by an Alabama audiologist who found the information still on the device and immediately contacted CRS to report and return it. The other two hearing-screening devices used by the Huntsville CRS office between 2007 – 2013 are being investigated.

CRS has determined that the risk of identity theft is extremely low because: 1) the Montgomery device was purchased and immediately returned to CRS by an audiologist within Alabama, and 2) none of the devices contained Social Security numbers or personal addresses.

The information on the devices included: child's name, gender and date of birth, mother's name, caregiver's name, and the hearing-screening results (*Pass, Fail, Retry, or Incomplete*).

ADRS has directly notified children's families who were affected in the Montgomery area by letter and has provided resources and recommendations to further protect their child's information. ADRS will continue to investigate the two devices used in Huntsville and follow the same protocol in notifying affected families. ADRS has notified the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as required in the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 regarding security and privacy. This notice is also posted on the ADRS public website:
rehab.alabama.gov/about/regulations

To prevent any future issues, ADRS is reinforcing its current policy and procedure to ensure that protected information is cleared from all devices, including all audiology equipment used in ADRS offices statewide.

Questions regarding this issue can be directed to CRS staff: Kim McLaughlin at 334-293-7132 or Cathy Caldwell at 334-293-7049.

Mission: To enable Alabama's children and adults with disabilities to achieve their maximum potential.