

County Administrator Statement for Board Meeting 9/17/2024

First and foremost, I would like to address the cyber incident that affected our County and many residents.

Let me start by sharing the facts.

Last October we detected unauthorized access to our network, referred to as a network disruption. As soon as we discovered this, we enacted our security protocols and contacted third-party forensic experts and federal law enforcement. We also launched a comprehensive investigation to determine the nature and scope of this incident that was completed just last month.

Throughout this unfortunate incident, we have diligently followed cybersecurity best practices and the advice of our outside privacy legal counsel.

I, like you, have read the comments and conspiracy theories circulating online. I want to address these with you tonight.

Cyber incidents are a far too common occurrence here in the United States and across the globe. The Identity Theft Resource Center [reported](#) in July that the number of people affected by data security incidents in the first half of 2024 increased 490% compared to the first half of 2023.

As many of you have told me, the letter you received from the County was one of several you received this month alone. Even as corporations, nonprofits, and governments work around the clock to mitigate cybercrime, this is our unfortunate reality.

As those of you who have led or worked for businesses that experienced a cyber incident likely know, it unfortunately takes time to determine who was affected and how to best contact them. Our extensive forensic and manual document review was time intensive, and we began notification as soon as we completed the investigation. There was no delay in our notification process.

I also want to make clear that we have no evidence that any of your information has been used for identity theft or financial fraud as a result of this incident.

However, out of an abundance of caution, we recommend that you take steps to protect yourself against identity fraud, including placing a fraud alert or security freeze on your credit files, obtaining free credit reports, and remaining vigilant in reviewing financial account statements and credit reports for fraudulent or irregular activity on a regular basis. Richland County has provided complimentary credit monitoring services for those whose Social Security numbers may have been affected, as determined by our investigation.

I want to assure you that data security is of the utmost importance to Richland County, and we are committed to protecting the information you all entrust to us. We continue to monitor our systems for any unusual activity and are investigating ways to further enhance our online security.

On a personal level, I would like to remind you all that we are a community. The divisive and hateful online rhetoric, as well as the misinformation being shared with the media, is disappointing and unacceptable. We cannot move forward if a small number of individuals continue to spread misinformation that only polarizes our community and fosters an environment of hostility and division. We are better than this.

I understand the sensitivity of this situation, and we have heard and completely understand your concerns. As Richland County representatives, we hold ourselves to the highest standard of integrity and want only what is best for our neighbors, and I sincerely hope you all do, too.

Richland County is a special place and has a very bright future. I am a firm believer that we are stronger together.

If you have further questions about this incident, please do not take everything you see on social media as fact, but instead reach out to us directly at 608-649-3823 Thank you all.