



Missing CPP applicants information investigation expands to Department of Justice

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Human Resources Minister Diane Finley stands in the House of Commons during Question Period;Friday;February 8;2013.

Photo Credit: Fred Chartrand , The Canadian Press

In December, 2012, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada said a misplaced USB key meant that personal information of about 5,000 Canadian Pension Plan applicants had been lost. The following month, HRSDC announced a different misplaced USB key had lost the personal information of more than half a million Canada Student Loans Program recipients was lost.

The first data breach included applications for pensions, old age security benefits, employment insurance and child care tax credits.

"It has come to our attention that an employee from the Department of Justice Canada may also have been involved in the loss of the USB device," reads a letter from an investigator in the office of Privacy Commissioner Jennifer Stoddart to one of those affected by the breach. "Our office is therefore investigating both HRSDC and Justice Canada regarding this incident."

Class actions have been launched in both cases.

The second external hard drive, which went missing from an HRSDC office in Gatineau, Que., contained

social insurance numbers, names birth dates, addresses and loan balances of hundreds of thousands of students or former students. HRSDC originally said only those who took out loans between 2000 and 2006. But people have come forward who took out loans more recently than that, indicating the pool of people affected may be larger than HRSDC claims.

The department did not respond to repeated requests for comment on this discrepancy, but an update on its website admits that 2,800 individuals affected fall outside the original window. "Efforts continue to locate current contact information for all affected borrowers."

HRSDC has said multiple times there is no evidence any of that personal information "has been accessed or used for fraudulent purposes." It has engaged the services of credit rating agency Equifax to flag the credit files of those affected and monitor them for any potentially fraudulent activity over the next six years.

In addition to complaints filed with Canada's Privacy Commissioner, many of those affected have launched a \$600-million class action suit, involving lawyers from multiple firms across the country. Ted Charney, one of several lawyers involved in the action, has said that number could grow substantially if there's any evidence of identity theft resulting from the breach.

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Correction: A previous version of this article conflated two distinct data breaches on the part of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. The Privacy Commissioner's investigation of the Department of Justice applies to the loss of Canadian Pension Plan applicants' personal information.

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