



**IDENTITY
& SECURITY**
CONFERENCE

December 1-2 Gaylord National Harbor

SECURITY

Who Knew We Needed It?

Tuesday December 2, 2025 | Kathy Seelye – Director for the Office of Tennessee Vital Records

- ❑ Volvo Data Breach linked to Ransomware Attack
 - ❑ Approximately 870,000 email records were leaked exposing SSN # of employees
- ❑ AWS – Amazon Web Services, the worlds most comprehensive cloud platform
- ❑ ManPower, Lansing Michigan, Ransomware attack, stole 500 GB of sensitive corporate and client data, including passport scan, SS#'s and IDs
- ❑ Farmers Insurance, A salesforce related supply chain attack, exposing personal data including names, DL #'s with birth dates.

How do you protect your private information?

Your personal cell phone?



Your banking information?



Your credit card company information?



Your social media..Facebook, Instagram, etc



Do you change or update your password for these platforms?

If so, how often?

Let's start back at the beginning

- ❑ The State of Tennessee went live in 2013 with what they thought was a finished EDRS system
 - ❑ - Within 2 months it crashed



You mean it had to have a state file number and be secure??

- ❑ So the entire system was put on the shelf for a couple of years and brought back out in 2015.
- ❑ A new team was put in place to re-launch this much needed project, but this team also had little experience with what was to become this State's new electronic system.



- ❑ 1st group to work with was the Funeral Directors and Funeral Homes
 - ❑ Approximately 2000 or so Directors
- ❑ We worked with the licensing board to get contact information for each Funeral Home and Director and mailed user agreements to them to complete and return
- ❑ We then processed those agreements but didn't send the links to activate their accounts until a couple of days before our go live date.
- ❑ This went extremely smooth, however we were still doing “drop to paper” for the certifiers so we needed to get our physicians on board as well.



TIME TO GET OUR PHYSICIANS ON BOARD

- ❑ We gathered statistics on how many medical providers would need access to our system through an access program
- ❑ We had approximately 6000 certifiers that had certified a death event over the last couple of years
- ❑ We had medical providers that completed over 2000 certificates a year to those that only did 1 per year
- ❑ Remember, that this team processing these were not as experienced as we should have been. Mass trainings started but we did not want to grant access to early, so accounts were not established at that time
- ❑ Hind-sight is never as it seems



Never set up your users accounts for them

Yes, that is exactly what we did!!

Saved to this PC

- Our application coordinator at the time had this great idea – let’s make it easy on our stakeholders and set up their accounts for them
- The State of Tennessee has a “secure” 4 step authentication process in place to help establish that the user logging in is the person that should be
 - We used; the same picture for everyone
the same security question for everyone
their first initial and last name for their used ID
the same pin # for all accounts
- How in the world did we ever think this was okay and YES, the very first day a spouse got into her husband's physician account
- In addition, even at this point we were not aware of the risks associated with granting access to our system



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Huge Learning Lesson

- ❑ All pin #'s had to be changed immediately
- ❑ Links had to be sent to all users to change their security information immediately
- ❑ This caused our go live date to be pushed back a couple of weeks





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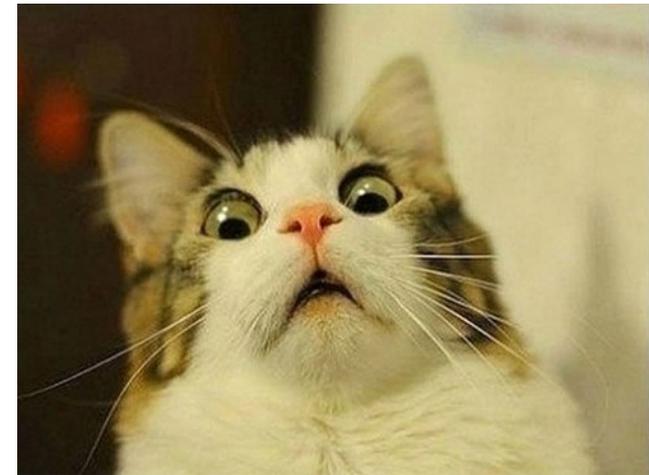
Call from the FBI

- ❑ FBI reached out to our security office regarding an individual that had been arrested with VRISM documentation in his briefcase
- ❑ He had hacked into the EDRS system in the state of Hawaii and registered his own death certificate in order to not pay child support to the state of Kentucky
- ❑ He had also registered many other death certificates and sold the information on the dark web
- ❑ How he gained access to our system was he submitted a user agreement for a retired medical certifier
- ❑ At that time, we were not verifying the license numbers and if they were valid
- ❑ We were very fortunate that he did not fully register a death event in our state, but he did gain some valuable information and sold that on the dark web



Naphsis Annual Conference

Imagine my surprise when the very first slide was that of the Tennessee Vital Records electronic registration system.



This is what he posted on the dark web

This allowed me to lookup and create new death certificates. Essentially I could've electronically killed anyone in the USA lol. I actually still think things along these lines are interesting and would make a very interesting service perhaps. Because of USA laws and the way social security numbers work when someone is killed it is almost impossible to simply correct the mistake if they are found living or that it was a mistake. It also would potentially create possible loopholes when it comes to any legal troubles that person was facing making things like warrants more difficult to enforce, debts, etc. There is also a system for creating birth certificates and certifying them which would potentially allow you to simply create people out of thin air that are in the system. I got the idea originally from an Australian hacker.

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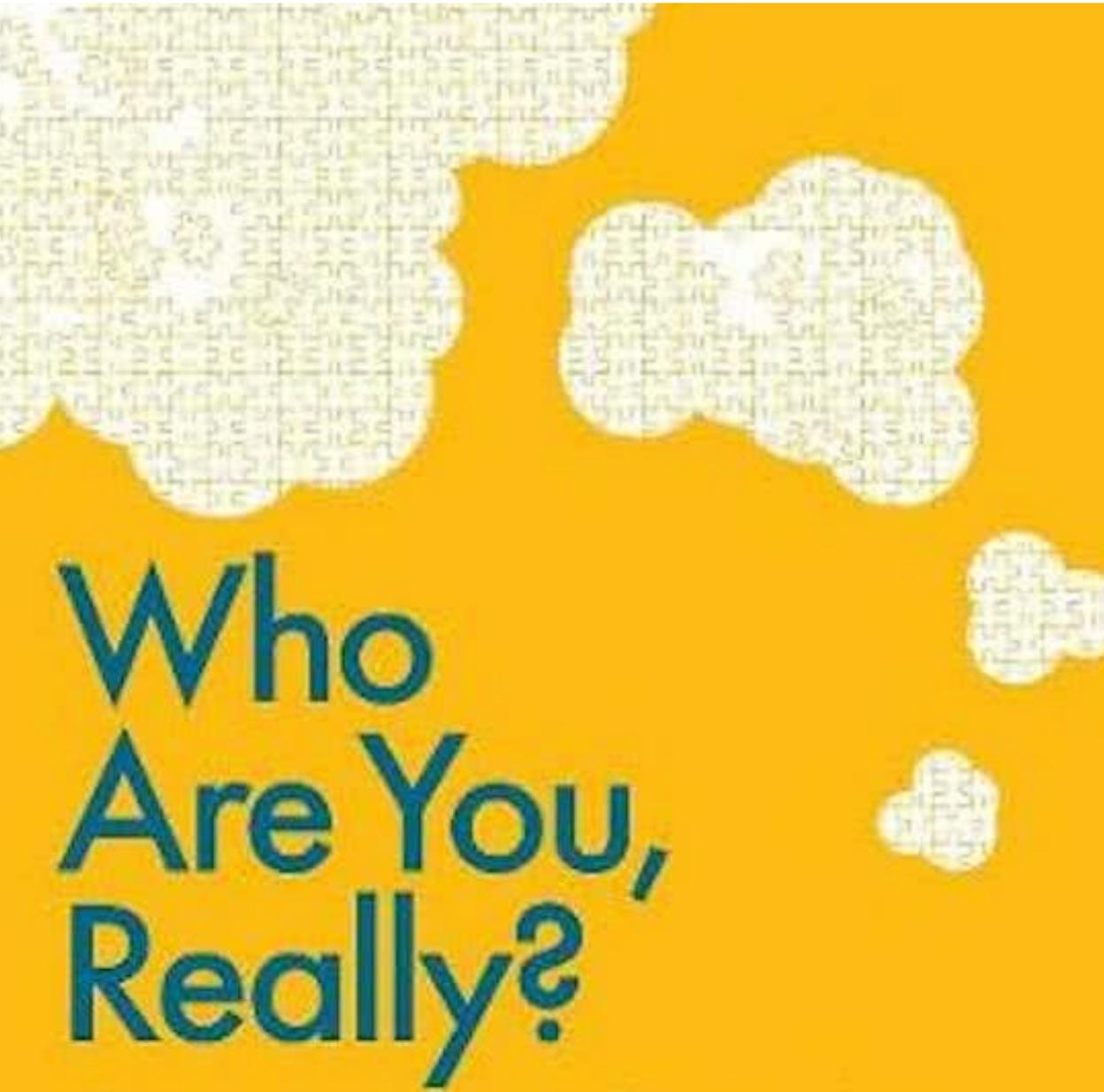
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DARK WEB

- ❑ In seeing the presentation at the conference, we learned that individuals that are able to hack into systems will then post this information for sale on the dark web thus allowing others to gain access
- ❑ When the FBI conducted their research on this individual they could see where he had posted information on to gain access to our system. This is one way that these individuals make their living is by selling this information
- ❑ Its not just the documents but the information on how to do that is valuable to them
- ❑ Shortly after this we did have someone submit a user agreement as a birth clerk at a non-birthing facility which caused red flags with us. We requested they call our office which they of course did not





You've sent me a user agreement, but who are you really and what do you want with this access?



Protecting Vital Event Data

So, what improvements did we make??

- We removed our user agreement link from our State website
- Every external stakeholder must complete a user agreement
- Requesters must use a work email address. We do not accept general email; yahoo, gmail, etc
- Birth certifiers employment must be verified prior to training on the system
- Training on the system must occur before account is set up
- All Funeral Director license are verified as valid with their licensing board
- All Physicians license are verified as current and valid with their licensing board
- We have developed reports to monitor when and how often users have logged in
- We are working with our vendor to use an identifier application to further identify applicants



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WHAT ABOUT DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR AUTHENTICATION

The IRS recently sent us two birth certificates that wanted us to validate as authentic.

An individual filed her taxes and claimed two children that I guess had not been submitted previously.

The IRS wanted her to submit copies of the children's birth certificates; this is what she submitted.



TN has no record on file for Anthony Perkins w/DOB 09/09/1963

STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

NAME: ANTHONY PERKINS
SEX: MALE
MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER: INEZ PERKINS
NAME OF FATHER: _____
DATE OF BIRTH: SEPTEMBER 9, 1963
COUNTY OF BIRTH: SHELBY
FILE DATE: OCTOBER 11, 1963

CERT. NO. 171-1963-0065452
DATE ISSUED: AUGUST 14, 2020

I hereby certify this is a true and correct representation of the record or document on file in this department. This certified copy is valid only when printed on security paper showing the red embossed seal of the Tennessee Department of Health. Alteration or erasure voids this certification. Reproduction of this document is prohibited. Tennessee Code Annotated 68-3-101 et. sec., Vital Records Act of 1977.

Teresa S. Hendricks, STATE REGISTRAR
John J. Dreyzahner, MD, MPH, FACCEM, COMMISSIONER

CERTIFICATION OF BIRTH

Not TN Birth Area Code

TN Registers with 6-digit State File Number

TN Stopped Issuing Short Forms in 2016

Not State Registrar in 2020

Not Commissioner in 2020



STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

NAME: DEMARCUS JACKSON
MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER: INEZ PERKINS

NAME OF FATHER: DONTE JACKSON

DATE OF BIRTH: JANUARY 3, 1979
CERT. No.: 181-1979-009548
DATE ISSUED: AUGUST 4, 2022

COUNTY OF BIRTH: SHELBY
FILE DATE: FEBRUARY 6, 1979

SEX: MALE

Teresa S. Hendricks
Teresa S. Hendricks
STATE REGISTRAR

John J. Dreyzelhor
John J. Dreyzelhor, MD, MPH, FACEM
COMMISSIONER

CERTIFICATION OF BIRTH

Annotations:

- TN record on file for registrant w/this DOB, but not with these parents (points to Name and Maiden Name of Mother)
- Not TN Birth Area Code (points to County of Birth)
- Not State File Number registered with this registrant and DOB (points to Cert. No.)
- TN Stopped Issuing Short Forms in 2016 (points to Date Issued)
- Not State Registrar in 2020 (points to State Registrar Signature)
- Not Commissioner in 2020 (points to Commissioner Signature)



To help identify information on certificates, we created spreadsheets with important information that was quick and easy to locate.

State Registrars and Term in Office

Name of Registrar	Term Dates by Years	Term Dates
H. H. Shoulders	1914-1918	1914-1918
Olin West (Acting Registrar)	1919-1920	1919-1920
C. B. Crittenden	1921-1932	1921-1932
Robert H. White	1932-1936	1932-1936
W. W. Hubbard	1936-1938	1936-1938
D. C. Peterson	1938-1948	1938-1948
Ruth R. Puffer	1949-1952	1949-1952
Mary R. Baird	1952-1970	1952-3/16/1970
Brice Hall	1970-1974	3/1970-10/1974
William T. Binkley	1974-1978	10/1974-1/1978
Wendell P. Spurgeon	1978-1983	1/1978-6/1983
Paula Taylor	1983-2004	6/1983-1/25/2004
Sharon Leinbach	2004-2010	1/24/2004-2010
Teresa Hendricks	2010-2013	3/29/2010-2013
Catherine Haralson	2013-2014	2/11/2013-2014
Teresa Hendricks (interim)	2014-2014	5/9/2014-7/2014
Lori Ferrenti	2014-2014	7/11/2014-12/2014
Benton McDough	2014-2016	12/17/2014-9/2016
Lori Ferrenti	2016-2017	9/6/2016-9/2017
Edward Gray Bishop	2017-Present	09/17/2017-Present

Commissioner and Term in Office

Name of State Health Official	Actual title	Appointed	Departed
Charles B. Crittenden	Commissioner	1923	1924
Eugene Lindsay Bishop	Commissioner	12/1/1924	2/5/1935
Wilson Carter Williams	Commissioner	2/6/1935	8/31/1943
Robert H. Hutchinson	Commissioner	9/1/1943	6/30/1969
Eugene W. Fowinkle	Commissioner	7/8/1969	1/14/1983
James E. Word	Commissioner	7/1/1984	10/26/1988
J.W. Luna	Commissioner	9/1/1988	1/19/1991
H. Russell White	Commissioner	1/20/1991	1/20/1995
Fredia S. Wadley	Commissioner	1/21/1995	2/6/1997
Nancy Menke	Commissioner	2/7/1997	Jan-99
Fredia S. Wadley	Commissioner	1/21/1995	2/6/2003
Kenneth S. Robinson	Commissioner	2/7/2003	1/19/2007
Susan R. Cooper	Commissioner	1/20/2007	9/18/2011
John J. Dreyzehner	Commissioner	9/19/2011	19-Jan
Lisa Piercey	Commissioner	2/4/2019	6/3/2022
Morgan McDonald	Interim Commissioner	6/3/2022	1/14/2023
Ralph A. Alvarado	Commissioner	1/16/2023	7/11/2025
John R. Dunn	Interim Commissioner	7/14/2025	current



DATE	EVENT
1-Sep-2016	VRISM Point of Sale Go-Live
1-Sep-2017	VRISM Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS) Go-Live
12-Mar-2018	Division of Vital Records and Statistics Established (Merged Vital Records & Vital Statistics Offices)
1-Jun-2019	VRISM Electronic Birth Registration System (EBRS) Go-Live
1-Dec-2019	VRISM Electronic Fetal Death Registration System (EFDRS) Go-Live
1-Dec-2019	VRISM Induced Termination of Pregnancy (ITOP) Go-Live
11-Mar-2020	COVID Pandemic Declared
16-Mar-2020	Vital Stats AWS until further notice (Never Returned to the Office / AWS became permanent)
17-Mar-2020	Limited VR Staff in Lobby / Special Services handled at the 3 rd Window
19-Mar-2020	Regions Bank going to Appointment only for Daily Deposit
19-Mar-2020	Lobby Closed to Public / Flyer Posted on doors
20-Mar-2020	Field Team AWS until further notice
24-Mar-2020	Vital Records Staff sent home "on-call" status
25-Mar-2020	VitalChek orders suspended
11-May-2020	Vital Records Office Soft Opening / Rotating Staff
25-May-2020	VitalChek turned back on
20-Jun-2020	All staff (except Vital Statistics / Field Tm) back in the office
1-May-2021	VRISM Electronic Marriage Registration System (EMRS) Go-Live
1-Jun-2021	Vital Records Lobby ReOpen to public / Hrs Adjusted (M - F 0800 - 1600 hrs) (Prior Tues / Thurs closed at 1800hrs)
1-Jul-2021	VRISM Electronic Divorce EDIVRS Go-Live
25-Oct-2025	One Page Death Certificate Implemented (2-page prior)
3-Apr-2023	(HB 0213 / SB1377) TCA 36-3-301: Persons who may Solemnize marriages In order to solemnize the rite of matrimony pursuant to subdivision (a)(1), a member of assembly must first opt in by filing notice of the member's intention to solemnize the rite of matrimony with the Office of Vital Records.
1-Jul	Adoptions / 45 day processing timeline
	Subsquesnt Marriage / No longer required to be sealed
	2 Step Training Role Implemented in VRISM for Special Services
	2 Step Registration Implemented for Safe Haven Birth



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Security used to be an inconvenience sometimes, but now it's a necessity all the time.

Martina Navratilova

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