



MONTANA UNIVERSITY SYSTEM
Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education

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April 13, 2006

Hon. Jim Keane, Chair
Economic Affairs Interim Committee
P. O. Box 201706
Helena, MT 59620-1706

Dear Representative Keane:

This letter is in response to your letter dated February 16, 2006 regarding the use of social security numbers (SSNs) in state agencies. I have notified the campuses of your concerns and solicited from them the reports you have suggested. In addition, I have reviewed the practices in my office and find that we only solicit SSNs for payroll and health insurance purposes. In payroll matters, we follow the Montana Personnel Division's recommended practices. We have not been providing the Section 7(b) notice which you referenced, but we are working with the state on consistent language to address that.

With regard to the use of SSNs for purposes of health insurance, please know that we are aware of your committee's interest in switching from the use of SSNs on health insurance cards to use of some other personal identifier. We are willing to work on this issue in conjunction with your committee and the state of Montana Health Care and Benefits Division.

The issue may be more complex for us due to our multiple payroll systems, but we are willing to consider how this issue can be addressed for the security of our employees.

We appreciate your work on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sheila".

Sheila M. Stearns
Commissioner of Higher Education

c: Paul Bogumill, Director of Benefits
Kevin McRae, Director Labor Relations and Personnel