

Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee
Hearing before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Terrorism
On “Ransomware: Understanding the Threat and Exploring Solutions”

Over the past twenty-five years, the digital revolution has transformed the way Vermonters and all Americans live our lives. We rely on Internet technology to communicate with our loved ones, store and access our private documents, and transact business. These technological advancements have resulted in remarkable opportunities for our citizens. Unfortunately, they have also provided criminals new ways to target and exploit the American people.

Today, the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Terrorism will examine the growing threat of cybercrime, and specifically the rise of ransomware attacks. Ransomware is a dangerous form of malware that can render entire computer systems inoperable unless the victim complies with the perpetrator’s demand for a ‘ransom’ payment. These attacks can be incredibly destructive, and I am deeply concerned about the increasing number of Americans that have been targeted.

Two years ago, the Chamber of Commerce in Bennington, Vermont, was the victim of a ransomware attack that infected all of its computers, servers, and hard drives. The Chamber is an important institution that has represented the Bennington community and local businesses for more than a century. It lost all of its electronic data in the attack and was effectively forced to start from scratch with an entirely new computer infrastructure. The Bennington Chamber of Commerce is just one example of Vermonters and other Americans who have been affected by ransomware attacks. These attacks can be devastating, particularly for individuals, small businesses, and non-profit institutions that do not have the resources to recover quickly.

That is why this hearing is so important. Cybercrime is not just directed against large corporations. This is a problem that can affect all of us. I commend Senators Graham and Whitehouse for shining a spotlight on this pressing problem, and look forward to working with them to find ways to appropriately protect Americans’ digital privacy and security.