



## **Stop and Think Before Connecting to Public Wi-Fi Networks** *By State Rep. Rosemary M. Brown (R-Monroe/Pike)*

National Cyber Security Awareness Month is an annual initiative led by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to raise awareness about the importance of cybersecurity. The internet has become such an integrated part of our society that affects everyone's life; in fact, many of us are connected to the internet at all times via our smart phones and tablets. It provides us with many benefits, but like other forms of modern technology, we must be aware of some downfalls to avoid cyber security threats.

Due to their increase in popularity, I want to specifically focus this column around public Wi-Fi networks. They are often available in restaurants, hotels, libraries, airports and more to make it online access easier for patrons. While they might save your data usage, they are not always secure, and they do have the potential to expose you to online risks and present an opportunity for cybercriminals to steal sensitive information.

Keep these tips from DHS in mind before connecting to a public Wi-Fi network:

- Confirm the name of the network and login procedures with staff to ensure the network is legitimate.
- Turn off auto-connect features that allow your phone to connect with public Wi-Fi networks, and always log out of the site you're accessing.
- Avoid online shopping, banking and sensitive activity that requires passwords or credit card information.
- Install updates for apps and operating systems as soon as they are available.
- Use different passwords for different accounts and devices, as well as do not choose options that allow your device to remember your passwords.
- Ensure the website you're visiting is encrypted, these sites use **https://** in their address.

Throughout the month of October, I encourage you to take a few steps to protect yourself and your family online. This information is from DHS's Stop.Think.Connect initiative, a national public awareness campaign to empower the American public to be safer and more secure online. For more information about their efforts, or additional details about what you've read here, visit [www.dhs.gov/stophinkconnect](http://www.dhs.gov/stophinkconnect).

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