UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT
DISTRICT OF RHODE ISLAND

NOTICE REGARDING
METADATA AND REDACTED INFORMATION IN PDF DOCUMENTS

Attorneys and *pro se* litigants are advised to exercise caution when creating Portable Document Format (PDF) documents for submission to the Court's Electronic Case Files (ECF) system. Steps must be taken to ensure that the documents are free of hidden data that may contain redacted information, or that traces of information that have been edited or deleted do not remain hidden in the final document. Even PDF content that has been encrypted <u>can</u> be recovered.

Users of the ECF system shall ensure that the PDF documents submitted to ECF are free of any hidden data which may contain redacted information.

METADATA

Metadata[1] is information that is kept within a file that does not get printed or displayed but can be accessed if the document isn't sanitized prior to uploading or sending.

Some examples of metadata are:

- the author of the document
- the file description/name
- location of the file on your pc; and
- dates of past revisions on the document

This information is collected by your software to help make the document more useful for the user, but this could pose a security risk outside of your office. Once the document is available outside of your office, access to this metadata is already out of your control.

This can happen to a PDF, Word and WordPerfect documents. Before one of these types of documents leave your office (such as uploading a PDF document in ECF), you should first sanitize the document. This process removes any sensitive or office related information that the document may contain.

There are several methods that can be adopted to remove revision metadata and file description metadata. In most word processing applications the "**save as"** command will create a new clean file removing revision metadata (results may vary for each software version). To prevent a word processing program - Word or WordPerfect - from saving/recording changes and edits, the following steps are recommended. **Users are referred to the software manufacturer's help resources for definitive information.**

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[1] This is not the actual content of the PDF but is the information collected by the program and referenced in the properties of the document.

Microsoft Word 2010

Step	Action
1	On the Review tab, select Track Changes Option and make the necessary modifications
2	After completing the document, click on the "File" button on the top left corner of the screen
3	Click on "Prepare for Sharing/Check for Issues"
4	Click on "Inspect Document."
5	Inspect the document for any and all the choices available. Remove as appropriate

Corel WordPerfect x5

Step	Action
1	Click on "Edit"
2	Click on "Undo/Redo History"
3	Click on "Options"
4	Be sure that "Save Undo/Redo Items with Document" is not checked.

The file also may be saved without metadata by clicking on "File," then "Save without Metadata." A common error in redacting information is to use the wrong method while trying to redact the electronic file.

Adobe Acrobat

All PDF documents should be sanitized before filing them in ECF. To do this you can use the tool built into the full version of Adobe Acrobat. Open the document you wish to sanitize and then go to "Tools>Protection>Sanitize Document" to ensure that the document does not contain metadata, see below:

Step	Action
1	Open the PDF
2	Apply your markup/edit on the document
3	Flatten the document: Tools/Add-On Tools/Flatten Pages - Choose "All"
4	Sanitize the document: Tools/Protection/**Sanitize** Document
5	Save the file as a PDF: File/Save As/PDF

You can verify the document is clean of any metadata by opening the newly sanitized pdf document by going to "File>Properties". When the "Document Properties" window opens, go to the "Description" tab and click on the "Additional Metadata" button. In the left pane of this window, click on the "Description" and the "Advanced" view to see if any information is in the

right pane. If there is no information there, your document is now sanitized and free of any metadata that it previously held.

Methods Not to Use

Changing the font to white (this only appears to make the words disappear)

Use of Adobe Acrobat graphic and commenting tools that can black-out, cover over or remove sections of text (these edits can be removed by anyone to reveal the text underneath)

Ink-marking or use of semi-translucent tape or paper to cover areas of a document to be scanned (your covered data may still show through, check your PDF document before it is filed).

REDACTING

Word Processing

The best way to redact a document is to not include the unwanted text initially.

If a document must be redacted or edited, use a simple-text editor (for example, use of Windows *Notepad* to create the final redacted version of the document. *Notepad* does not save any hidden code, as it only uses simple-text (.txt) format.

Redacting a Scanned File (tiff, jpeg, gif)

Removing metadata or redacted information is more difficult when dealing with an "image" or photo of a file. The data which contains that image may not be fully removed or destroyed using common software tools. Check the software's support documentation to manipulate graphics to find if the tools offered are sufficient to redact a document.

Redacting a PDF File (converted)

Adobe Acrobat 9 and higher versions allow you to remove selected text and images from PDF documents. The *Redaction* tools make this process quick and easy. By using the *Search and Redact* tool, you are able to remove all occurrences of a specific word(s), phrase(s), or information type (e.g., all social security numbers). This option works only with searchable PDF documents. If your document is not searchable (e.g., if it was scanned), you must make redactions manually. To access the Adobe *redaction* tools, click on View/Tools/Protection/Search and Remove Text.

Redacting a PDF File (scanned)

The Adobe Acrobat redaction tools do not work on a scanned document, therefore you must make redactions manually. Consider printing the document and using the method for redacting a paper document, below.

Redacting a Paper Document

Before scanning the document, cut out (literally) all the text to be redacted and properly dispose of (shred) the clippings, or use opaque (100% impenetrable by light, neither transparent nor translucent) tape or paper to cover over the sections to be redacted. Do not use plain-paper as the scanner may pick up images through the paper.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For additional information refer to: (links current as of the date of this notice)

http://www.fas.org/sgp/othergov/dod/nsa-redact.pdf
http://www.uwec.edu/help/Acrobat9/redact-srch.htm
http://www.computerworld.com.au/article/215187/recovering_pdf_redaction/?fp=4194304&fpid=1

NOTE: The Clerk's Office staff are not experts on file metadata and other hidden text, and neither endorse nor guarantee any specific method to "sanitize" a document.

February 19, 2014   /s/ *Susan M. Thurston*
                                                 Clerk of Court