

Texas high courts hit by ransomware attack, refuse to pay

May 13 2020, by Jake Bleiberg

Texas courts have been hit with a ransomware attack that took down the website and case management systems for the state's appellate and high courts.

The attack on the courts' network was discovered by staff Friday morning after beginning overnight, according a statement the Office of Court Administration issued Monday. It says staff limited the damage by disabling part of their network and that the courts will not will not pay any ransom.

Local trial courts appear to have been unaffected and there is no current evidence that sensitive or personnel information was compromised, according to the statement.

Hackers use ransomware to invade computer systems and encrypt files in an effort to extort ransom payments to unlock them. The hack left Texas' top civil and criminal courts without a working case management system or internet in their offices and led staff to put out rulings over Twitter, Blake Hawthorne, the top administrator of the Supreme Court of Texas, said Tuesday.

He said the courts' separate document filings system remains operational, the courts are working to ensure lawyers and the public can access [court records](#) through other means and that the courts are still granting motions for extensions on deadlines.

"We're trying to use everything available to us to keep access to the courts so we're using Twitter and [social media](#)," Hawthorne said.

The judicial branch has set up a temporary website and is working with the Texas Department of Information Resources and [law enforcement](#) to respond to the attack, according to the statement. It says the attack is not related to the courts' shift to remote hearings during the coronavirus pandemic.

A Texas Department of Information Resources spokeswoman said questions should be directed to the courts. An FBI spokeswoman did not immediately respond to requests for comment. The hack follows a [ransomware attack](#) of unprecedented size that hit more than 20 local governments in Texas last summer.

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