



NEWSLETTER

Volume 6: Fall 2024

Local Consumer Advocacy

The (Springfield) Mayor’s Office of Consumer Information (MOCI) is your Local Consumer Program (LCP) serving Hampden County and parts of Worcester County. It is funded by and works in cooperation with the Massachusetts Attorney General’s Office (AGO).

Its mission is to bring consumer awareness to you, and utilize this newsletter as a means of communicating current concerns targeting consumers of all ages and demographics. The MOCI is dedicated to bringing information into the community to help consumers be better prepared to protect themselves and their finances from any potential scam and fraud.

Since July of 2024, the MOCI saved consumers nearly \$90,000 in the form of a refund, repair or credit through its consumer advocacy efforts of its 200 cases, averaging \$2,100 per case.

These days, consumers seem quite concerned about their credit card debts. In fact, recently the MOCI has provided several presentations on financial literacy, and has a series of workshops scheduled for this fall.

With the increasing high cost of living, consumers are being forced to survive on their credit cards. However, many, if not most, of consumers do not understand the concept of using a credit card and the consequences of the Annual Percentage Rate (APR), Buy Now Pay Later and Deferred Credit. One department store credit card recently notified its customers of an APR increase to 34.49% beginning October 1.

Let’s give you an example of a \$500 credit card balance with a new average APR of 34.49%: A minimum payment of \$15/month will take 9 years and 4 months to pay off the debt, resulting in \$1,178.80 in interest. Compare to paying \$50/month, taking 12 months to pay off, resulting in \$97.92 in interest. To calculate your debt, visit Bankrate.com or Calculator.net.

CONSUMER BEWARE: It is likely that many of the flooded cars from down south could be making their way to used dealers or on social media ads (marketplace). You want to avoid these vehicles at ALL costs. While the cars may look great, floodwater damage can cause mechanical, electrical, safety issues and health problems (mold). Read how to spot a flood damaged car: <https://www.wcpo.com/money/consumer/dont-waste-your-money/flooded-cars-from-hurricane-helene-could-be-headed-to-used-car-lots>

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Beware: Scammers are Rotten to the Core!

Deed fraud is becoming more common and most homeowners/property owners are unaware of the danger and costs of falling victim.

What is Deed Fraud? When a perpetrator impersonates the actual owner and records fake or forged documents with the registry of deeds, unbeknown to the actual owner in real time.

**Sign up for alerts with your local registry of deeds
*Be vigilant and read mail
*Don’t click on links to unsolicited emails or text messages
Be reluctant in sharing personal details with unknown callers

CONSUMER TIP: If you detect fraudulent activity on your property deed, immediately contact your Registry of Deeds!

SCAMS, SCAMS & MORE SCAMS

Don't Fall for any of these scams

Skimming Devices: Scammers are placing these devices over the actual keypad at credit card terminals and ATM machines. Best protection to avoid this scam is to use "Tap and Pay" or if using your debit card, process the transaction as "credit" to avoid having to enter your PIN.

Fake Websites: To avoid being lured to a fake website, type the address in the URL. Better yet, bookmark the websites you visit often (bank, credit card, shopping, airline). Recently, the MOCI has discovered misleading websites for Massachusetts official agencies. We encourage you to visit Mass.Gov when looking to connect with a state-official government agency.

Romance Scam: On average, Americans lose \$10,000 to \$100,000 to romance scams. Don't be left financially and emotionally broken. Be skeptical of unsolicited emails, texts or social media messages.



MYTH OR FACT

Lowering your insurance deductible will save you money on your premium

TRUE: Increasing your deductible on your homeowner or car insurance will save you a couple of hundred dollars per year. Call your insurance agent to inquire.

Monthly and yearly subscriptions can save you both time and money

MYTH: While subscriptions are convenient, they are often easily forgotten. You want to regularly review recurring charges for subscriptions you no longer, use or want, or even forgot you had.

Credit cards will decrease interest rates when your accounts are in good standing

MYTH: Although credit card companies often increase your credit limit when your account is in good standing, they do not willingly decrease your interest rate (APR) however you can call to request a lower interest rate on new charges.

A budget is frugal consumers

MYTH: A budget is for everyone, regardless of your age and income level. Tracking your daily, weekly and monthly expenses give you a clear picture of what you can and cannot afford. *Be honest and be sure to include your gourmet lattes and cappuccinos!*

IMPORTANT REFERRALS WITH LINKS



Massachusetts Attorney General's Office:
www.mass.gov/orgs/office-of-the-attorney-general

Report Fraud to the Federal Trade Commission:
ReportFraud.ftc.gov

Get your three free credit reports weekly:
AnnualCreditReport.com

Take control of your Social Security Administration account by creating a Login.gov or ID.me account. Scammers are known to create an account to takeover the victim's identity and finances.

Login.gov and ID.me allows you access to participating U.S. Government agencies by proving your identity and authentication.

Be sure to strongly safeguard your login/password credentials!

TAKE THE ONE MONTH CA\$H CHALLENGE...

Store away your credit/debit cards and carry only cash! At the end of the month, tally how much you saved and spent! Guarantee, you'll have ca\$h leftover.

(WHY? Because it's harder to part from it).