

The Consumer Insider

Better businesses. Smarter consumers.



Division of Banks • Division of Insurance • Division of Professional Licensure • Department of Telecommunications and Cable • Division of Standards • State Racing Commission

Consumer Tips for Recent Graduates

The Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation offers the following tips for recent high school and college graduates:

1) Money Management: Financial planning is critical for new graduates. Create a budget; track your spending; pay off debt, especially those with high-interest rates (i.e. credit cards); pay yourself first (take money out of each paycheck to put into a savings account or mutual fund); and invest in a 401(k). For more, click on [Five Smart Money Moves for New College Graduates](#).

2) A Guide to Renting Your First Apartment: It's an exciting time! You may be venturing out on your own and looking for your first apartment. For tips, go to [Tenant/Landlord Rights & Responsibilities](#).

3) Protect Yourself from Identity Theft: Learn how to avoid becoming a victim of identity theft and what to do if you are victimized at the following link: [Identity Theft](#).

4) Get Insured

Health Insurance: Health insurance is mandated by law in Massachusetts. Learn about options for obtaining coverage at [Commonwealth Connector](#).

Disability Insurance: When you are young, disability insurance is at least as important as life insurance. Since disability insurance protects your potential future earnings, you should consider it an important part of your insurance program.

Auto Insurance: Massachusetts has shifted from regulated rates to managed competition so that consumers can shop around for the best rates. To see how you can save on auto insurance click on [Auto Insurance](#).

Join the Conversation at 'Consumer Connections'

The Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation has launched a new blog focused on consumer issues, called "Commonwealth Conversations: Consumer Connections." Through the blog, the office will offer insight and information into consumer-related subjects like identity theft, financial literacy, foreclosure prevention and housing, and auto insurance.

Along with passing on timely and important information, the blog is also our forum for conversations about what's on your mind. If you have an issue you'd like to see discussed, or have questions about topics we bring up at the blog, we encourage you to write a comment – whether it's a question, critique, or your own tips or success story handling a problem – to share with other interested consumers.

To join the conversation, click [here](#).

News From the Undersecretary

I've been working in consumer advocacy throughout my career, and I find that after just a few weeks as Undersecretary of the Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation, my passion for my work is as strong as ever. I love working to create smarter and more savvy consumers and to ensure fairness in the marketplace for both consumers and businesses.



The Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation and its member agencies are involved in some of the most important matters that millions of Massachusetts residents face, whether it's car insurance, finding the right licensed professional, protecting your personal financial information from identity thieves, or navigating through financial service products like credit cards and mortgages. I hope to move the agency forward as a proactive voice for consumers in Massachusetts and to use the power of the office as a bully pulpit on behalf of consumer interests, while at the same time ensuring a level playing field for Massachusetts businesses.

This is something of a homecoming for me, after serving as Assistant Undersecretary in this office in the late 1980s. Since then, I've worked in the both the public and private sectors, identifying important consumer issues and finding solutions to them. Most recently, I was Executive Director at Health Law Advocates, a non-profit law firm dedicated exclusively to health care access.

I am very grateful to Gov. Deval Patrick and Secretary Gregory Bialecki for their confidence and support as I take on this important mission, and I look forward to working with them. I also look forward to hearing from you, whether it's joining the conversation at our blog, Consumer Connections, or whether it's through a phone call to our hotline or a complaint via our Website. These are challenging times, but I look forward to continuing the Patrick Administration's and our agencies' efforts to empower and support consumers, communities and businesses.

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Consumer Hotline: 888-283-3757 or 617-973-8787
www.mass.gov/consumer

Get More Use from Plastic Bags

There are some things that are almost universally brought home from the grocery store, things like milk, bread, eggs, and plastic bags.

The food will eventually be eaten, but the plastic bags will stick around. These bags aren't recyclable, and they don't biodegrade. But you can get a few extra uses out of them before they end up in the local landfill by following these tips:



- Place them in the bottom of plant pots and hanging baskets, they act as great drainage systems.
- Use them as doggy doo bags when out walking your dog.
- If you buy a plastic liner for your garden to stop the growth of weeds, use the plastic bags you have instead.
- Use them instead of trash bags to hold grass cuttings and hedge trimmings before transferring them to the compost bin.
- Scrunch them up to surround items when you're packaging as an alternative to bubble wrap or styrofoam peanuts.
- Use them when packing for a holiday to keep dirty/wet clothes and shoes away from dry and clean clothes.
- Some supermarkets recycle plastic bags, so you can return them.

Remember to reuse, reduce and recycle!

Opportunity Knocks!



On Saturday, May 9, the Square One Mall in Saugus was host to one of five "Opportunity Knocks" events held throughout the state and co-sponsored by the Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation. Low- and moderate-income homebuyers had the opportunity to meet with lenders about financing options, and discuss home buying with real estate agents. Five events were also held on May 2.

Results of the April Money Smart Quiz

In the April issue of **The Consumer Insider**, we included a Money Smart quiz. The results are summarized below.

- 100 percent of quiz respondents knew that a flexible spending account is an employer benefit that allows you to pay for certain expenses pre tax dollars.
- 100 percent of respondents knew that information that can hurt your credit, like late payments, will remain on your credit report for up to seven years.
- 80 percent of respondents stated that they knew that banks calculate debt-to-income ratio as total debt by total income.
- Surprisingly enough, 60 percent of respondents said that they have not requested their free annual credit report(s).
- When asked what deductions come out of your take home pay, 60 percent of respondents said "taxes." 40 percent elaborated further, answering taxes, FICA, Social Security, and/or voluntary deductions.
- 80 percent of respondents knew that if your credit card is stolen and the thief runs up a total debt of \$1,000 that the maximum amount you can be forced to pay by law is \$50.
- 80 percent of respondents knew that if they earn a four-year college degree, they could expect to earn about 70 percent more than if they had a high-school diploma.
- 60 percent of respondents stated that they have the equivalent of six months' salary saved in an emergency fund. 20 percent said that they have two months' salary saved in an emergency fund. And another 20 percent stated that they didn't have an emergency fund.
- When asked if they pay their credit cards in full each month, 40 percent said they do. 60 percent said they pay in full sometimes.
- When asked what is considered a deductible expense by the IRS, 100 percent of respondents answered correctly - telephone and taxi expenses incurred while performing charitable work.