Take Charge America Helps Consumers Stand Up to Debt Collector Harassment

Nonprofit credit counseling agency outlines consumers’ rights, offers tips for ending harassment

PHOENIX – (Sept. 10, 2014) – In an economy still reeling from the Great Recession, many Americans continue to face financial hardships including significant debt, bad credit and loan delinquency. To make matters worse, many people are also dealing with debt collectors who are threatening or aggressive.

“Most third-party debt collectors are paid on commission and receive minimal training, and sometimes they bully people with threatening language,” said Mike Sullivan, director of education for Take Charge America, a national nonprofit credit counseling and debt management agency. “However, this behavior is inexcusable and illegal. Consumers who know their rights don’t have to put up with it.”

The Fair Debt Collection Practices Act protects consumers from debt collector harassment. To help people understand their rights and end abuse from collection agents, Sullivan offers the following tips:

1. **Don’t Engage** – When debt collectors call, consumers should keep the conversation as short as possible. Instead of engaging by phone, they should ask the collection agent to send a letter outlining the details of the debt, and they should never provide any personal or financial information such as Social Security or bank account numbers.

2. **Ask for ID** – Debt collectors are not allowed to act anonymously. When asked, they must provide their name and the name of their collection agency. Additionally, they are not allowed to suggest or falsely claim they represent or have connections to government agencies.

3. **Verify the Debt** – Consumers should request written notice of the debt including the amount owed, the name of the original creditor and instructions on how to dispute the debt if there’s a question about its validity. By law, collectors must provide this information within five days of receiving a request. If it appears the debt is a result of identity theft, consumers should report it to the Federal Trade Commission at 877-ID-THEFT (438-4338).

4. **Verify the Agency** – If consumers agree to pay the delinquent debt, they should verify the collector is valid and reputable before submitting payment. They are also advised to monitor credit reports and bank accounts to ensure the collection agency debits the agreed-upon dollar amount and applies the payment correctly.

Consumers who are dealing with multiple collectors or are struggling to repay their debts may benefit from working with a nonprofit credit counseling organization like Take Charge America. For more information on debt management, credit or bankruptcy counseling, call (888) 822-9193 or visit www.takechargeamerica.org.
About Take Charge America, Inc.

Founded in 1987, Take Charge America, Inc. is a nonprofit agency offering financial education and counseling services including credit counseling, debt management, student loan counseling, housing counseling and bankruptcy counseling. It has helped more than 1.6 million consumers nationwide manage their personal finances and debts. To learn more, visit www.takechargeamerica.org or call (888) 822-9193.

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