

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS OVERSIGHT



**PROTECT YOURSELF
FROM FRAUD**

For Servicemembers, Veterans and their Families

DEPARTMENT *of*
BUSINESS OVERSIGHT

State of California · Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency

About the DBO

The Department of Business Oversight (DBO) regulates state-licensed financial institutions, products and professionals.

As part of its mission, the DBO also strives to help consumers protect their personal finances against fraud.

For a list of licensees and industries regulated by the DBO visit www.dbo.ca.gov

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The DBO has created this consumer education booklet to help military servicemembers and veterans make sound financial decisions and protect themselves and their families from common scams and fraud.

Office of Education and Outreach

The DBO's Office of Education and Outreach is committed to providing consumers helpful information and materials on a variety of financial topics. The outreach programs empower Californians to make smart decisions about their finances. Informed and educated consumers are less likely to fall victim to financial fraud.



Protect Yourself From Fraud for Servicemembers, Veterans and their Families

This program alerts and educates the California military community about financial fraud, predatory lending, and how to avoid scams.



The Mortgage Education Outreach Program

This program provides information and resources about homeownership and the home buying process, loan modifications, preventing foreclosure, and mortgage fraud and scams.



Seniors Against Investment Fraud

This program alerts and educates California seniors about financial fraud and scams.



Protect Yourself and Your Family From Financial Fraud and Scams

You might be surprised — veterans, servicemembers and their families are prime targets of financial fraud and scams.

Affinity Investment Fraud

Affinity fraud relies on bonds of trust. Take the time to learn the red flags so you can spot and avoid investment fraud. Military ties can be exploited to commit fraud — in some cases, by fellow servicemembers or veterans. No matter how well you know the salesperson, and even if you served with them, make sure they are licensed and the investment product is registered. Minimize your risk by asking questions and getting the facts about any investment, and the broker.

The Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) Broker Check is a free tool to research the background and experience of securities brokers, financial advisers and firms. For more information, go to <https://brokercheck.finra.org> or call 1-800-289-9999.

See the Resource Guide on page 19 for FINRA information.

Ponzi and Pyramid Schemes

Most affinity fraud involves Ponzi or pyramid schemes in which new investor money is used to pay earlier investors, creating the illusion that the investment is sound and profitable. In reality, the fraudster almost always steals investors' money for personal use. Both types of schemes depend on an unending supply of new investors. When the inevitable occurs, and the supply of investors dries up, the scheme collapses and investors lose most or all of their money.

WARNING SIGNS

- Each new recruit must make an upfront investment or purchase a starter kit to join.
- Participants make money on each new recruit.
- There is no customer refund policy.
- Salespeople try to create the impression they have special “certified” credentials or expertise in “military” or “veteran” services and products.

Promissory Note Fraud

A promissory note is a form of debt that companies sometimes use to generate revenue. A company promises to return the buyer’s funds (principal) and make fixed-interest payments in exchange for borrowing money.

Some promissory notes can be legitimate investments, while others turn out to be fraudulent.

Contact the DBO to determine whether the seller is properly registered and in compliance with California’s securities laws, or check with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) at www.sec.gov/edgar.shtml to see if the notes are registered. Most promissory notes are securities and have to be registered with the SEC.

Remember that securities are never guaranteed and there is always some risk involved.

Online Escrow Scams

Carefully evaluate online escrow sites before signing up for any service offering “safe or secure” transactions when buying or selling online.

Unfortunately, some are phony copycat sites. Contact the DBO to verify that an escrow company is licensed.

TIPS

- Avoid any escrow service that does not list an address or phone number on their website.
- Do not give personal or financial information over the Internet, unless it is via a secure website, and you initiate the contact.

Secure sites have an “s” at the end of the “http” in their website address, displayed as “https.” Most web browsers display a padlock icon to indicate a website is secure.

Left side of search bar:



Right side of search bar:



Money Wiring/Transfer Scams

Scammers use a variety of tactics to persuade people to send money, such as saying you have won a prize, lottery or inherited money, but have to pay fees or taxes in advance. Scammers also pose as a friend or family member who is in trouble and needs you to send money immediately.

TIPS

- Never wire or transfer money to anyone you do not know.
- Verify independently that a friend or family member is in need of financial assistance.

Report these scams to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) at www.ftc.gov/complaint or call 1-877-382-4357.

Pension Scams

Veterans and their families also have been targets of pension scams. Such schemes often involve unscrupulous attorneys and financial advisors who convince veterans to transfer their assets into a special trust account to qualify for additional benefits, then charge exorbitant fees to help complete complicated paperwork for the transfer.

WARNING SIGNS

- Offers of pension cash advances.
- Offers of free help with paperwork to qualify for additional benefits.
- Offers to transfer assets to a trust or invest in insurance products.

Contact the DBO to verify whether the seller is properly licensed and in compliance with California's securities laws.

For more information about the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) pension eligibility requirements, go to www.benefits.va.gov/pension or call 1-800-827-1000.

“Immediate Action Required” Requests

Don't believe promises of quick profits, insider information, or sales pitches like “you must act now.” If a salesperson won't allow you time to compare prices and features or explore other options, these can be warning signs of fraud.

Bait-and-Switch Schemes

Dishonest salespeople may try to change interest rates, terms and conditions, or other important financial details of a service agreement. They may also try to convince you to buy financial products or investments that you cannot afford, that are not in your best interest or that may be entirely different from what you thought you were purchasing. Always check to make sure the paperwork matches the promises and never sign a blank form!

Charity Scams

Con artists often try to take advantage of others' generosity, especially after a disaster such as a flood, hurricane or fire. Verify that a charity is legitimate before sending a check or providing your credit card number. For more information, visit the Office of the Attorney General at www.oag.ca.gov/charities

Bogus Online Sales

Scammers use online auction and classified ad sites to claim to be active military heading for overseas assignments. They offer jobs, apartments, or goods available for a quick sale before they leave. In reality, they often have nothing to offer and will take your money. Try to use local sites and do not give out personal financial information.

Home/Vacation Rental Scams

Beware when searching the web for home or vacation rentals. Scammers can hijack legitimate rental listings, change the information and advertise at a discounted price, leaving you with fake keys for a property that doesn't exist.

TIPS

- Never wire money to anyone for a deposit, rent, or fees associated with a rental property.
- Never send money without having a lease and confirming that the property manager has a right to lease the property.

Lottery and Sweepstakes Scams

Scam artists use promises of valuable prizes or awards to persuade people to send money. Victims receive a letter, email or text message claiming they have won a foreign lottery or sweepstakes. Scammers tell victims to claim their prize by sending a personal check, money order or wire transfer to cover "upfront costs." It is illegal for a U.S. resident to play a foreign lottery, and it's also illegal to pay upfront costs or fees to claim such a prize.

Foreign Letter Scams

If you receive an email or letter claiming to be from a foreign government, foreign official, widow or servicemember asking you to send personal or bank account information, do not reply. Do not believe promises of large sums of money for your cooperation. Always guard your personal and financial information carefully.

Phishing Scams

Phishing involves real-looking emails that seek personal and financial information. Usually, the message appears to be from well-known and trusted government agencies (IRS or VA), banks and credit unions, as well as many popular retail stores. The emails may even look like they are from friends or family. If you think you have received one of these bogus messages, contact that agency, department, business or person directly to verify.

Internet Romance Scams

Scammers create fake online profiles on dating sites or social media. They profess their love quickly and tug at your heartstrings with sob stories about how they need money for emergencies or medical bills. If your online sweetheart asks for money, it's likely a scam.

For more information on how to protect yourself from fraud and scams, visit www.dbo.ca.gov/Consumers/brochures/ or call 1-877-275-2677.





Managing Your Finances



Making smart financial decisions requires analysis and careful attention to detail. Some servicemembers have lost national security clearances due to financial problems. Financial troubles and bad credit also can follow you back to civilian life.

Simple Steps to Manage Your Money

- Make a list of all your income sources and expenses (big and small).
- Keep tabs on your investments, insurance, phone bills, checking, savings, and credit card accounts.
- Review statements frequently to ensure all fees and charges are accurate.
- Plan ahead for large expenses such as insurance, mortgage payments, property taxes, and vehicle registration.
- Factor in special occasions, unexpected expenses and medical emergencies.
- Establish an emergency fund for unexpected expenses.
- Use credit cards for convenience only, and pay them off monthly, if possible. Always try to pay more than the minimum payment.
- Don't take out loans you cannot afford, or that contain excessive interest or fees.

Create a Budget

An important first step in money management is creating a budget. Make adjustments as your financial circumstances change. See Budget Worksheet on the DBO website at www.dbo.ca.gov/consumers/brochures/

Maintain Good Credit

Lenders use your credit score to determine whether you qualify for a credit card, loan or other financial services. It also impacts interest rates on current and future loans. The higher your credit score, the lower the interest rate you pay. You can improve your credit score by paying your bills on time and paying them off in full.

To avoid surprises, review your credit score before you apply for new loans, mortgages, or credit cards.

As part of the U.S. Department of Defense Financial Readiness Campaign, active duty servicemembers and their spouses can receive a free copy of their credit score by using the Free Credit Score Analysis Tool at www.saveandinvest.org/free-credit-score-and-analysis-tool

For Help With Credit or Creditor Problems

National Foundation for Credit Counseling

Visit www.nfcc.org or call 1-800-388-2227

HUD-approved Housing Counseling Agencies

These agencies offer financial management, budget, debt and credit counseling whether or not you are trying to buy a home.

Visit www.hudexchange.info/programs/housing-counseling/customer-service-feedback/ or call 1-800-569-4287.

Request Your Credit Report

A credit report shows your credit activities, including loans, unpaid balances, how regularly you make payments, and any actions against you due to unpaid bills.

To request a free credit report from Equifax, Experian or TransUnion, go to www.annualcreditreport.com or call 1-877-322-8228. Consumers can request a free credit report every 12 months. Some websites advertise “free” credit reports, but may charge you for another product if you order the report.

Review credit reports carefully and regularly to make sure you are not a victim of identity theft. Look for accounts you do not recognize (especially new accounts), or addresses where you have never lived. Report any discrepancies immediately.



Call the credit bureaus

Equifax 1-866-349-5191

Experian 1-888-397-3742

TransUnion 1-800-680-7289

Before Making A Major Financial Decision

- Identify your financial goals and analyze various options. Consider how much financial risk you can tolerate, and recognize this may change as your life circumstances change.
- Invest only what you can afford to lose.
- Verify that people who make money from your purchases and investments have proper credentials before you give anyone your financial or other personal information.
- Always ask salespeople to fill out the “Check Before You Sign” form (see page 17) to verify their California license, company and products. Contact the DBO to see if there have been any disciplinary actions against them.
- Insist that salespeople disclose, in writing, all costs, service charges, penalties, fees, products and services. Ask about any potential conflicts of interest.
- Be sure to ask about prepayment and early withdrawal penalties or fees.

Transaction Fees and Surcharges

- Be aware of fees and surcharges! Airline and concert tickets, ATMs, hotels, and even gift cards may have charges that make seemingly inexpensive items more expensive.
- These small charges make it difficult for you to compare prices, and can quickly add up to hundreds of dollars per year.

For more information about managing everyday finances, visit www.SaveAndInvest.org

Federal Financial Institution Regulators

Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation

Consumer Response Center
1-877-275-3342 (1-877-ASK-FDIC)

Office of the Comptroller of the Currency

Customer Assistance Group
1-800-613-6743

Federal Reserve Consumer Help

1-888-851-1920

National Credit Union Administration

Office of Consumer Protection
1-800-755-1030

Car Loans

Check with your bank or credit union to explore car loan options and interest rates before accepting a dealer's loan. Also consider whether you will be able to manage the payments, car insurance, operating costs and repairs.

Avoid Costly Overdraft Fees

Watch for fees on checks, ATM withdrawals, debit card purchases and bill payments that are debited electronically from your account. Contact the bank or credit union for assistance. For state-chartered banks and credit unions, contact the DBO.





Financial Difficulties

If you or your family members are having financial troubles, don't let fear or embarrassment stop you from seeking help. This section explains common issues for people experiencing financial hardships and provides resources for financial recovery.

Payday Loans and Online Cash Advances

In California, payday loans (also called cash advances or deferred deposit loans) are regulated by the DBO. Payday loans may look like a good way to get quick cash between paychecks, but they carry high interest rates, up to 36 percent for individuals on active duty status and much higher for others. California law restricts these loans to a maximum of \$300, and the same lender cannot issue a new loan to pay off an existing payday loan.

To receive one of these loans, the borrower must fill out an application, provide necessary documentation and write a check which the lender will not deposit until the borrower's next payday, up to 31 days later. Payday lenders and online companies that provide deferred deposit transactions are required to post their California license and fee schedule at every store and website.

Unlicensed Internet Payday Lending

Payday lending sites have increased across the

Internet. Consumers are strongly urged to verify that a lender is licensed before providing personal information and borrowing funds. Illegal lenders may collect from your bank account without your permission, charge you a higher interest rate, and sell or pirate your personal financial information. If they are operating out of state or overseas, it is nearly impossible to track them down and recover lost funds. Before borrowing from an online payday lender, verify that the lender is licensed by the DBO and check if an enforcement order has been issued against them.

Loan Modification and Foreclosure Companies

These companies and consultants typically offer to renegotiate an existing mortgage or prevent foreclosure in exchange for a large upfront fee. As a result, distressed homeowners often end up paying for services that may be available for free, or receive little to no help.

Help is available

Military personnel and families who are experiencing difficulties with a mortgage, need to renegotiate a loan or prevent foreclosure should immediately look for free legal help on base. Be sure to ask whether the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) would apply to your circumstances.

Servicemembers Civil Relief Act

The SCRA provides a wide range of protections for those in the military. It is intended to ease financial burdens to enable soldiers to devote full attention to duty and relieve stress on the family members of deployed servicemembers.

The SCRA allows military families to defer:

- Credit card debt
- Mortgage payments
- Pending trials
- Taxes
- Lease terminations

For more information, visit

<https://scra.dmdc.osd.mil/scra/>

Debt Collectors

If you are late making payments on a loan, credit card or other bills, you may be contacted by a debt collector. If you are contacted or harassed about a debt or transaction that is not yours, be cautious. This could be a scam artist trying to get your personal information and money.

Know your rights under California's as well as the federal Fair Debt Collection Practices Act.

Information about both can be obtained from the California Attorney General's Office and the Federal Trade Commission.

Facing Bankruptcy

If you plan to file for bankruptcy, you must get credit counseling from a government-approved organization within 180 days before you file. You also have to complete a debtor education course before your debts can be discharged. For more information, visit

www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0224-filing-bankruptcy-what-know

TIPS

- If you need assistance with your finances, contact your base financial counselors. They can help you review your financial situation and develop a personalized money management plan.
- Every service branch has aid societies to provide advice and emergency financial help to servicemembers and families.

For a complete listing, visit

www.militaryonesource.mil

Military Lending Act (MLA)

Most types of consumer loans offered to active duty servicemembers and their dependents must comply with the MLA.

These products include, but are not limited to:

- Payday loans, installment loans, deposit advance products, and vehicle title loans.
- Overdraft lines of credit (but not traditional overdraft services).





If you're on active duty and decide to take out one of these loans, you have rights under the MLA, including a limit on the interest rate the creditor can charge. There are some loans the MLA doesn't cover – namely, credit that is secured by the property being purchased. These loans include:

- Residential mortgages, mortgage refinances, home equity loans or lines of credit, and reverse mortgages.
- A loan to buy a motor vehicle when the loan is secured by the motor vehicle you are buying.
- A loan to buy personal property when the loan is secured by the property you're buying, such as a home appliance.

The MLA also assures that active duty soldiers (including those on active National Guard or active Reserve duty) and covered dependents cannot be charged higher than a 36 percent Military Annual Percentage Rate (MAPR) on most types of consumer loans.

If you have an issue with a consumer loan, you can submit a complaint to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) at www.consumerfinance.gov or by calling 1-855- 411-2372.

Contact your local Judge Advocate General's (JAG) office to learn more about lending restrictions. You can use the JAG Legal Assistance Office locator to find help at <http://legalassistance.law.af.mil/content/locator.php>

Anticipatory Loans

Anticipatory loans allow you to borrow from your future income and do not require a credit check or lengthy approval. They may seem to be an easy way to get cash in a hurry, but they will reduce your future income, such as a tax refund, by the amount of the loan plus charges, fees and high interest.

Car Title Loans

Car title loans require you to sign over your vehicle title to the lender and pay a fee to borrow money. In California, consumers usually must pay the loan back within two years. If you cannot make the payments, the lender can sell your vehicle to repay the loan. If you are seeking a car title loan to pay living expenses, consider asking your creditors for additional time to pay your bills or seek help from a credit counselor.

Installment Loans

Consumers who need more money than they can get from payday loans may try installment loans. These loans are repaid in installments, usually over one year or longer. Lenders report payments to credit bureaus, so consumers can improve or harm their credit scores depending on their situation. Before you sign a contract, calculate the full cost of the loan, and be cautious of unnecessary fees.



Homeownership

Buying a home is exciting. It's also one of the most important financial decisions you'll make. Choosing the right mortgage to pay for your new home is just as important as choosing the right home.

Buying a Home

The DBO licenses and regulates a variety of mortgage specialists, including residential mortgage loan originators, mortgage lenders, escrow agents and mortgage loan servicers. To verify the license or file a complaint against one of these individuals, contact the DBO.

You can also verify the license of real estate professionals. See page 18 to contact the California Department of Real Estate.

Home Loans for the Military Community

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) helps servicemembers, veterans, and eligible surviving spouses become homeowners. The VA provides a home loan guaranty benefit and other housing-related programs to help buy, build, repair, retain, or adapt a home if necessary.

For more information, visit www.benefits.va.gov/HomeLoans

If you live in California, a CalVet home loan can save you money, simplify the lending process, and help protect your investment.

For more information and to check eligibility visit www.calvet.ca.gov/HomeLoans or call 1-866-653-2510.

Know Your Rights

Consumer Protection Laws:

The California Residential Mortgage Lending Act (CMRLA) requires DBO licensees to be ethically, financially and professionally qualified to serve consumers.

For more information, visit www.dbo.ca.gov

The California Homeowner Bill of Rights (HBOR) requires mortgage lenders and servicers to treat consumers fairly, especially those facing foreclosure.

For more information, visit the CA Attorney General's website at www.oag.ca.gov/hbor

The federal Truth in Lending Act (TILA) protects consumers against inaccurate and unfair credit billing and credit card practices, and requires lenders to provide consumers with loan cost information so you can comparison shop for loans. For more information, visit the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency at www.occ.gov

Warning signs of foreclosure fraud:

- Advance fees for loan modifications are illegal in California *unless* you have an advance fee agreement.
- An offer to rent your house to you until your finances rebound.
- Anyone who rushes or encourages you to sign forms that contain blank spaces to be "filled in later."
- A mortgage rescue company that contacts you first. Many are not legitimate. Always select a company with the assistance of trained professionals.

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau

The CFPB can help you find approved housing counselors in or near any U.S. ZIP Code. This resource can be found at www.consumerfinance.gov/find-a-housing-counselor or by calling 1-855-411-2372.

Beware of Foreclosure Rescue Scams

Real help is free! Foreclosure rescue and mortgage modification scams are a growing problem that could cost you thousands of dollars or even your home. Scammers often make promises they can't keep, such as guaranteeing to "save" your home or lowering your interest rate.

They often charge a high fee and pretend to have direct contact with your mortgage servicer.

If you think you've been scammed, file a complaint immediately. See *How to File a Complaint* on page 20. For more tips for struggling homeowners, see *Path To Homeownership* at www.dbo.ca.gov/Consumers/brochures/Path_to_Homeownership_English.pdf

Homeowners struggling with their mortgage payments should keep the following tips in mind:

TIPS

- Only your mortgage servicer has the discretion to grant a loan modification. No third party can guarantee or pre-approve your mortgage modification application.
- Paying a third party to assist with your application does not improve your likelihood of receiving a mortgage modification.
- Verify any individual or company that claims to be affiliated with the U.S. government in correspondence, or on the web. Call the Homeowner's HOPE Hotline at 1-888-995-HOPE (4673).
- Beware of individuals or companies that advise you to stop making your mortgage payments or discontinue contact with your mortgage servicer.
- Do not sign over the deed to your property to any individual or organization unless you are working directly with your mortgage company to forgive your debt. Never sign it over without professional advice.

TIPS

- Know your new cost of living. Locations may vary.
- Determine your housing budget and calculate how much you can afford to spend on housing.
- Check and try to improve your credit score. Whether you're planning to buy or rent, your credit score matters.
- Property managers frequently check the credit of potential renters.
- When buying a home, compare rates and limits between a VA loan and other loans.

The VA home loan is one of the few that does not require a down payment. You need to be careful that you don't end up underwater if you have to sell your house in the next few years, before you've had a chance to build equity. Consider how rising home prices and interest rates may affect your monthly payment and mortgage products in general.



Ask yourself these questions before trying to sell your home:

- Can I sell my home at a price that will pay off my mortgage?
- Can I rent my home at a price that will cover the mortgage payment?
- Will I receive a different housing allowance at my new duty station?
- Will my spouse be able to find a comparable job at our new location fairly soon?
- Will I receive a Permanent Change of Station?

If you answered “no” to any of the above questions, you should consider talking to:

- Your lender to see if you can negotiate a loan modification that lowers your monthly payments and makes the mortgage more affordable.
- Your installation's personal financial managers. They may be aware of resources that can help members of the military who have trouble selling their homes.
- The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which has foreclosure avoidance counselors (see page 6).

Keep in mind that your housing allowance may be tax exempt, a significant advantage over civilian home shoppers. Be careful not to overextend yourself. Decide whether to rent or buy. If you plan to stay in your new home for less than three years, it's usually a good idea to rent.

If you decide to buy, consider whether you'll be able to rent the house for enough to cover your mortgage if you have to move again before you can sell the house.



Safeguarding Your Personal and Financial Information

Protecting your personal information can reduce your risk of financial exploitation and identity theft.

Protect Your Social Security Number, Credit Card and Debit Card Numbers, PINs and Passwords

Carry only what is necessary in your wallet or purse: a credit card, debit card or checks. Keep the rest, including your Social Security and Medicare cards, in a safe place.

- Do not print your Social Security, telephone or driver's license number on your checks.
- Never give your account numbers over the phone unless you initiate the call.
- Keep a close watch on bank, credit union and credit card statements. Report discrepancies immediately.
- When making a purchase online, use a credit card that is not linked to your bank accounts.
- Shred canceled checks, credit card statements, and other financial documents that contain your personal and financial information.

- Never use birth dates, phone numbers, the last four digits of your Social Security number or your mother's maiden name as passwords.
- Sign up for direct deposit of your paycheck, pension check or government benefits.
- Protect your incoming mail by using a locked mailbox for your residence and promptly removing mail after it has been delivered.
- Do not leave mail out for pick up. If mail is stolen, contact the U.S. Postal Inspection Service at 1-877-876-2455 or go to www.postalinspectors.uspis.gov

Reduce Unsolicited Correspondence

To opt out of pre-approved credit and insurance offers, visit www.optoutprescreen.com or call 1-888-5-OPT-OUT. The phone number and website are operated by the major consumer reporting companies.

The federal government's National Do Not Call Registry is a free, easy way to reduce the telemarketing calls you receive. To register or to get information about the registry, go to www.donotcall.gov or call 1-888-382-1222 from the phone number you want to register.

The Direct Marketing Association offers a service to help you reduce unsolicited commercial emails, mail and phone calls from DMA members. Visit www.dmaconsumers.org to register.

If You are a Victim of Identity Theft

Immediately report identity theft to your local police department and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). If the loss involves funds held in a bank or credit union, report the problem to the financial institution immediately. The FTC recommends that you immediately take the following actions:

- Create an identity theft report.
- Place an initial fraud alert and order your credit report from one of the three nationwide credit reporting companies (see page 6).

- Consider placing an extended fraud alert or freeze on your credit.

If Your Debit Card, Checks or Bank Account Information Are Lost or Stolen

Immediately notify your bank or credit union to stop payments and notify their check verification company:

ChexSystems 1-800-428-9623

TeleCheck 1-800-710-9898

If Your Social Security Number is Stolen

If you suspect that someone else is using your Social Security number, immediately contact the U.S. Social Security Administration at www.ssa.gov or call 1-800-772-1213 (TTY 1-800-325-0778).

Identity Theft Resources

The California Office of the Attorney General at www.oag.ca.gov/idtheft

The FTC Identity Theft hotline 1-877-ID-THEFT (1-877-438-4338) or at www.ftc.gov



10 Ten Tips to Avoid Cyber Fraud:

- 1 Be cautious of emails that contain attached files; the files may contain viruses.
- 2 Avoid filling out forms contained in email messages that ask for personal information.
- 3 Do not reply to unsolicited email (spam) or pop-up messages that ask for personal or financial information.
- 4 Never click on links in unsolicited email.
- 5 If you receive an email claiming to be from a company you do business with, contact the business to verify the email is genuine.
- 6 Log on directly to the official website for the business identified in the email instead of clicking a link in an unsolicited email.
- 7 If an email appears to be from your bank or credit union, credit card issuer, or some other company you deal with frequently, verify its authenticity before you respond. Your statements or official correspondence from the business will provide the proper contact information. Financial institutions will not request your personal information via email.
- 8 WiFi hotspots provide free Internet access in coffee shops, libraries, airports, hotels, universities, and other public places. While convenient, public WiFi networks often are not secure. Protect your personal information while using a public wireless network.
- 9 Avoid exposing sensitive information such as your logins, passwords and Social Security number.

If a WiFi hotspot does not require a password, it is not secure. Other users on the network can see what you send. Your personal information, private documents, even login credentials could be accessed without your knowledge or permission.



Check Before You Sign

Before signing a contract or mortgage, have the person offering products or services complete, sign and return this form to you. Verify both the person and company are licensed or authorized to sell or offer the specific type of product by contacting the appropriate licensing agency (see the next page for agency contact information). Keep the completed form for your records.

Seller/Agent and Company Information (please print clearly)

Seller/Agent Name _____
Company/Business Name _____
Company/Business Address _____
Phone Number(s) _____
Email _____

I am offering the following product(s) and/or services (check all that apply)

Financial Planning: Financial Planning Services Investment Advice

Financial Services: Mortgage Refinance Mortgage Modification
 Reverse Mortgage Home Equity Loan
 Escrow/Title

Real Estate: Broker/Agent Other _____

Appraisal: Home Appraisal Services

Insurance: Mortgage Insurance Title Insurance Property Insurance
 Earthquake Insurance Flood Insurance Life Insurance
 Other _____

Legal Services: Document Review Contract Review Estate Planning
 Other _____

Accounting: Accounting Services Tax Preparation
 Other _____

Contractor Services: Home Repair Remodeling
 Other _____

I am currently licensed by

CA Department of Business Oversight License #: _____

CA Department of Real Estate License #: _____

CA Bureau of Real Estate Appraisers License #: _____

CA Department of Insurance License #: _____

CA State Bar Association State Bar #: _____

CA Board of Accountancy CPA License #: _____

CA Contractors State License Board License #: _____

Other _____ License #: _____

I certify that I am making these representations truthfully in order to do business with you.

Signature: _____ Date: _____





Before Signing or Seeking Advice

have the person offering products/services complete the other side of this page, sign and return it to you.



Verify

both the salesperson or advisor and their company are licensed and authorized to sell or offer the specific type of product. Remember to keep this completed form for your records.



Contact

the appropriate California licensing agency below (or call the California Department of Business Oversight for referral to the appropriate regulator).

Resource Guide

Agency	Responsibilities	Contact Information
CA Department of Business Oversight (DBO)	Licenses and regulates individuals and companies engaged in various financial activities, including investment advisors, brokers, escrow, mortgages, payday lenders and state-chartered banks and credit unions	1-866-275-2677 TTY 1-800-735-2922 www.dbo.ca.gov
CA Department of Insurance (CDI)	Licenses and regulates insurance agents, brokers, companies, and products	1-800-927-4357 www.insurance.ca.gov
CA Department of Real Estate (DRE)	Licenses and regulates real estate matters and professionals	Fresno 1-559-445-5009 Los Angeles 1-213-620-2072 Oakland 1-510-622-2552 Sacramento 1-877-373-4542 San Diego 1-619-525-4192 www.dre.ca.gov
State Bar of California	Licenses attorneys and regulates the profession and practice of law in California. Administers the California Bar Exam and disciplines attorneys who violate rules and laws	License verification and complaints 1-800-843-9053 www.calbar.ca.gov
CA Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA)	Licenses and regulates more than 100 professions, including accountants, doctors, contractors, automotive repair, fiduciaries, cosmetology and the cannabis industry	1-800-952-5210 www.dca.ca.gov



Resource Guide

Agency	Responsibilities		Contact Information
CA Department of Social Services (DSS)	Provides information about social services, including cash aid, food, transportation, housing, health, residential care, day care, disaster services and in-home care		1-916-651-8848 www.cdss.ca.gov
CA Employment Development Department (EDD)	Provides assistance with jobs and training, state disability insurance and unemployment. Offers regional Veterans' Employment-Related Assistance Program (VEAP)	See website for directory	www.edd.ca.gov
CA Franchise Tax Board (FTB)	Administers two of California's major tax programs: Personal Income Tax and Corporation Tax	General Assistance	1-800-852-5711 www.ftb.ca.gov
CA Public Utilities Commission (CPUC)	Regulates privately-owned utilities, natural gas, telecommunications, and transportation companies	Consumer Affairs Branch	1-800-649-7570 www.cpuc.ca.gov
Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA)	Regulates both the firms and professionals selling securities in the U.S.	Broker Check	1-301-590-6500 1-800-289-9999 www.finra.org
Military One Source	A 24/7 resource for individualized consultations, coaching and counseling for many aspects of military life		1-800-342-9647 www.militaryonesource.mil
U.S. Department of Defense (DOD)	The starting point for finding U.S. military information for servicemembers and their families		1-703-571-3343 www.defense.gov
U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC)	Provides consumer protection on loans, credit cards, identity theft, telemarketing, funerals and cemeteries		1-877-382-4357 www.ftc.ca.gov
U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC)	Licenses and regulates national securities exchanges (NYSE and NASDAQ), investment companies, mutual funds and investment advisors		1-800-732-0330 www.sec.gov
Vet Center	Provides a broad range of counseling, outreach, and referral services to combat veterans and their families	Crisis Line	1-800-273-8255 1-877-927-8387 www.vetcenter.va.gov

For a complete list of resources, visit: www.dbo.ca.gov/Consumers/pdf/Consumer_ResourceGuide.pdf



HOW TO FILE A COMPLAINT

Do you think you have been a victim of financial fraud?

Do you think you have been scammed?

Help us protect Californians from unlicensed or fraudulent consumer transactions.

How to File a Complaint with the California Department of Business Oversight

1. For the fastest response, file a complaint form online. Download the form from our website at www.dbo.ca.gov/consumers
2. If you don't have access to a computer, call us at **1-866-275-2677** to have a complaint form mailed to you.
3. Summarize your complaint and provide all relevant information that may help us understand and review your complaint.
4. Provide copies of all documents supporting your complaint (do not send originals, Social Security numbers or any other sensitive information).

Mail the completed and signed complaint form to:

California Department of Business Oversight

Consumer Services Office

1515 K Street, Suite 200

Sacramento, CA 95814

Register to Access Your Benefits:

Department of Veterans Affairs

www.va.gov/ebenefits/homepage

California Department of Veterans Affairs

www.calvet.ca.gov



DEPARTMENT *of* **BUSINESS OVERSIGHT**

The California Department of Business Oversight would like to thank the numerous state and federal agencies and other organizations for their contributions to the information covered in this booklet.

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS OVERSIGHT



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