



ELDER FINANCIAL PROTECTION



STATE OF MAINE ♦ BUREAU OF CONSUMER CREDIT PROTECTION
DEPARTMENT OF PROFESSIONAL AND FINANCIAL REGULATION



DOWNEASTER COMMON SENSE GUIDE TO ELDER FINANCIAL PROTECTION

BY DAVID LEACH, MPA, AND JESSIE GUEST

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Maine Bureau of Consumer Credit Protection

Toll-free Maine Consumer Assistance
1-800-332-8529 (1-800-DEBT-LAW)
TTY users call Maine relay 711

Maine Foreclosure Prevention Hotline
1-888-NO-4-CLÖZ
(1-888-664-2569)

www.Credit.Maine.gov

The Maine Bureau of Consumer Credit Protection was established in 1975 to enforce many important consumer financial protection laws, including:

- -Consumer Credit Code
- -Truth-in-Lending Act
- -Fair Credit Billing Act
- -Truth-in-Leasing Act
- -Fair Credit Reporting Act
- -Fair Debt Collection Practices Act
- -“Plain Language” Contract Law

The Bureau conducts periodic examinations of creditors to determine compliance with these laws; responds to consumer complaints and inquiries; and operates the state’s foreclosure assistance hotline and housing counselor referral program. The Bureau also conducts educational seminars and provides speakers to advise consumers and creditors of their legal rights and responsibilities.

William N. Lund
Superintendent
November 2017

DOWNEASTER COMMON SENSE GUIDE: DEBT COLLECTION

By David Leach, MPA and Arianna Castonguay

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Maine residents can obtain additional free copies of this booklet by contacting the Bureau of Consumer Credit Protection at 207-624-8527 or toll-free at 1-800-332-8529. Non-Maine residents may purchase the publication for \$6 per copy, or at a volume discount of \$4 per copy on orders of 50 or more. Shipping fees are included in the prices listed.

Dear Maine Seniors:

You've worked hard to get where you are – whether you have raised kids and grandkids, worked various jobs, or both. Many of you own your own home and have put some savings away. So what's your reward?

Unfortunately, seniors are often targeted by financial scams. Some people will try to take advantage of your trust and separate you from your savings, benefits or retirement checks.

Maine has strong consumer protection laws you can use to your advantage. You can avoid many problems if you learn the warning signs accompanying most financial scams or cases of elder financial abuse.

For more than 30 years, our agency has assisted Maine elders. We have compiled the results of that experience into this booklet, the *Downeaster Guide to Elder Financial Protection*. If you have questions that aren't covered in this booklet, call us from anywhere within Maine at 1-800-332-8529 (1-800-DEBT-LAW), or contact us through our website, www.Credit.Maine.gov. We'll do our best to assist you.

William N. Lund, Esq.
Superintendent

Special Thanks to Our Contributors

The following professionals provided valuable information in the formation of this booklet: Denis Culley (Maine Legal Services for the Elderly), Seth Blodgett (Maine Office of the Attorney General), Ricker Hamilton (Maine Department of Health and Human Services), Alyson Cummings (Maine Office of Securities), Elaine Thibodeau, Penny Vaillancourt and Jeffrey Frankel (Maine Office of Professional and Occupational Regulation), Ann Beane (Maine Bureau of Financial Institutions), and Pamela Roybal and Norman Stevens (Maine Bureau of Insurance).

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Stopping Junk Mail / Telemarketing and Financial Scams 1

- Do-Not-Call Registry
- Opting Out of Pre-Approved Credit Card Offers
- Financial Scams: Canadian Advance Fee Scam, Nigerian Scam and Others
- Investment Scams and Available State Assistance
- Consumer Resources for Stopping Scammers

Chapter 2: Identity Theft / Credit Reports / Banking 6

- Common Means of Identity Theft
- ID Theft Victim Assistance Information
- Tips to Guard Against ID Theft
- What is a Credit Report? (Plus How-to Order Information)
- How to be an Alert Banking Customer
- “Freezing” Your Credit File
- Reverse Mortgages

Chapter 3: Financial Exploitation 10

- What is Financial Exploitation?
- Financial Exploitation and Debt Collection
- Warning Signs of Exploitation
- Plan Ahead to Avoid Becoming a Victim of Elder Abuse
- Financial Exploitation Victim Assistance Information

Chapter 4: Insurance and Occupational Licensing in Maine 15

- Your Insurance Questions Answered
- SHIP (State Health Insurance Assistance Program)
- Partial Listings of Boards that License Maine Professionals
- Note on Hearing Aids

Chapter 1

Simplify Your Life: Stop, Calls, Credit Offers, and Junk Mail!

Stop Annoying Telemarketing Call Interruptions!

Telemarketing calls have become an unwanted nuisance to many Maine seniors. To stop most telemarketing calls to your home, contact the Federal Trade Commission's National Do Not Call Registry and have your number placed on their list. The *Do Not Call Improvement Act of 2007* requires names stay on the registry permanently unless removed by request of the citizen.

If you continue to receive calls after registering, please be patient. Your registration is not effective immediately — it takes about a month. If telemarketers are still calling more than a month after placing your name on the registry, keep track of the names and telephone numbers of the companies, and the dates you received calls from them.



Use this information to file a complaint at www.DoNotCall.gov, or by calling 1-888-382-1222. Placing your name on the registry is free and is available for both home (land line) and cell phone numbers.

*Note: If you register, companies you do business with may still call you, as can charities, political organizations and telephone surveyors.

Clean Up Your Mailbox!

You can "opt out" of receiving direct mail credit card offers by calling a toll free hotline, 1-888-5-OPT-OUT (1-888-567-8688). The toll free telephone number above is a safe, secure resource line created by the three major credit reporting agencies: Equifax, Experian and Trans Union.

To add your number to the Do Not Call Registry, dial:

1-888-382-1222,

or for hearing-impaired:

TTY 1-866-290-4236

Financial Scams: What to Watch Out For and How to Get Help!

Whether they arrive via U.S. Mail, the Internet, or over the telephone, these crimes are a growing threat to Mainers of all ages! It is important to recognize different types of scams to avoid becoming a victim. Some of the more common financial scams are:

- Canadian Advance Fee Loan Scam
- Nigerian Scam
- “Bank Examiner” Scam
- Demand Draft Scam
- Fake Check Scam
- Charity Scam

Do NOT Pay for Money

Advance fee fraud scams are a multi-billion dollar problem. In these scams, a con artist offers a loan in exchange for an up front payment. Although the scammer may provide a U.S. address for the “company,” they often ask for funds to be sent to Canada via money transmitters such as Western Union™, Green Dot and MoneyGram™. Once they receive their fee,

To safely stop other types of “junk mail” solicitations, write:

DMA Choice
Data & Marketing Association
PO Box 643
Carmel, NY 10512

In your letter, include your name and your full mailing address.

the scammers disappear and the loan never materializes. Scammers are often pushy, asking for immediate decisions. Don't let them pressure you. If you receive any offer of credit or a loan requiring you to pay a fee in advance, you are being scammed.

Unclaimed Fortunes

Many elderly consumers report receiving unsolicited emails, faxes and telephone calls about unclaimed “riches” in foreign countries. In exchange for a few thousand dollars, these con artists promise they will wire hundreds of thousands of dollars to your bank account. Don't fall for this long-running scam. Never wire money or provide bank account information in response to promises of riches. Strangers don't send strangers large sums of money!

“Phony Bank Examiner” Scam

“Bank Examiner” scams date back to the 1960s, and still trick some unwary 21st Century consumers. A crook will call the victim, claiming to be a “bank examiner” or “security officer.” The “security officer” asks the consumer to withdraw a large amount of money from a bank teller suspected of stealing funds. The “security officer” then offers to take the bag of cash back to his “office” to count it. The scammer leaves the branch with the victim's cash and is never seen again. If you ever find yourself dealing with a situation like this, do not withdraw your funds. Immediately contact bank personnel or the police to report this criminal activity.

Demand Draft Scams

Why are scammers so interested in obtaining your bank account numbers? They may want to create a check-like instrument called a **demand draft**. Once a crook has a person's banking information, they print the victim's account number and the bank's transit/routing information in magnetic ink on the draft. The scammer deposits the draft and the victim's bank removes the funds from the victim's account. Never disclose your bank account information to unknown solicitors!

“Phony Check” Scam: Beware of the “Check in the Mail”

Have you received a check for an unexpected large sum of money? You may be the



Boiler Room Operations

Consumers often mention they hear many other voices in the background of scam calls. Many con artists set up shop in rented offices crammed with workers. **These operations are called “boiler rooms.”** They can be quite noisy!

potential victim of a fake check scam. These scammers send an authentic-looking check, asking the victim to wire some of it back (often as a refund, tax, or fee). You might **not realize it's a scam until after sending the money**. It can take a few weeks to learn the **crook's check bounced**, they closed the account, or the funds are unavailable!

Charities:

Be an Informed Giver!

Charity fraud can occur by telephone, mail or in person. Crooks pretend to represent an organization with whom they have no connection. Ask for the charity's full name, and watch out for suspicious statements. Some fake charities use names similar to the names of well-known organizations. Pushy campaigning or offers of a courier service to rush donations can also tip you off to potential scams.

If you're not sure a charity is legitimate, ask for their Maine license number. Confirm by calling the Maine Office of Professional and Occupational Regulation at 207-624-8603.

Charities often pay telemarketers to gather funds for their organization. In exchange, the telemarketing company receives a percentage of each donation collected. If you get a call asking for a contribution, be sure to ask the caller if they are a paid solicitor for the organization. Under Maine Law, fundraisers must disclose this information. Be wary if they refuse to tell you or say they do not know.

Investment Scams: Investigate Before Investing!

Imagine a company offers you an investment opportunity with high returns, but it's only available if you act *right now!* Just as you go to pick up the phone to cash in, your instinct tells you to rethink the idea. Who do you call to ask questions about the opportunity? The guy on the phone got angry when you told him you would call back. People over the age of 65 are commonly targeted by investment scams, due to the buildup of assets such as **home equity and IRA's over their lifetimes.**

The Maine Office of Securities is a wonderful resource for elders with questions about investments. Ask yourself these questions if you are thinking about investing, or if you get a call from a possible investment scammer¹:

- Is the investment registered in Maine with the Office of Securities?
- Is the person selling you the investment licensed in Maine?
- Do you (the consumer) understand the product they are selling you?

If the answer to any of these questions is no, the Office of Securities advises elders to be aware of potential harm to their finances.

Phrases associated with investment scams include²:

- “There’s no risk”
- “You need to act on this right away”
- “It’s an amazingly high rate of return”

The Office of Securities recommends that you receive a second opinion from a valued professional or qualified personal resource before investing!

Before making any commitment to a potentially unlicensed individual, call the Office of Securities! They welcome your call at 1-888-624-8551 | TTY 711 or visit them online at www.investors.maine.gov

For additional information on investments, call the above toll-free number for your free brochure from the Office of Securities titled *Resources for Maine Investors Approaching or In Retirement.*



¹Questions from *Resources for Maine Investors Approaching or in Retirement.* Maine Office of Securities.

²Warnings from *Resources for Maine Investors Approaching or in Retirement.* Maine Office of Securities.

Stopping Scammers In Their Tracks: Consumer Resources at Your Fingertips!

Federal Trade Commission

The Federal Trade Commission protects American consumers with information on identity theft, credit reports, debt collection and legal rights.

Consumer Response Center: 1-877-382-4357 ♦ www.ftc.gov

National Consumer Law Center — Boston, MA

Expertise and advice in legal matters for low-income and vulnerable U.S. consumers.

1-617-542-8010 ♦ www.nclc.org

Phone Busters and RECOL (Reporting Economic Crime On-Line)

Phone Busters and RECOL are the places to call for more information on Canadian scams, or to stop one!

1-888-495-8501 ♦ www.phonebusters.com | 1-888-495-8501 ♦ www.recol.ca

Better Business Bureau — Marlborough, MA

This non-government organization provides information and ratings for consumers on businesses and charities, and provides consumer outreach.

1-800-422-2811 ♦ www.boston.bbb.org

Chapter 2

Identity Theft: What It Is, How It Occurs, and How to Protect Yourself

Identity theft occurs when a thief steals personal information and uses it for financial gain. This can include taking out loans in a **consumer's name**, applying for housing or government benefits, or gaining access to credit card, bank, credit union, investment or retirement accounts. The thief assumes the identity of the victim, and goes on an illegal spending spree.

Means of Identity Theft:

- Dumpster Diving is the practice of looking through trash or discarded documents to find personal information. Crooks search through trash at retail stores, restaurants, and gas stations looking for credit and debit card numbers and information from consumers. If a carbon receipt is used by the merchant, always ask for that receipt.
- Shoulder Surfing is looking over **someone's shoulder while he or she is** entering private information into an

ATM or a personal form. This is especially effective in crowded areas where it is easy to get close to a person without being obvious.

- Pretexting is becoming a popular method of identity theft. A crook will create a situation that increases the chances a victim will reveal personal information. Pretexters often claim to be working for companies or government agencies. These scams can occur in person, over the telephone, via the internet, through direct mail solicitation or by fax.
- File breaches occur when a **organization's files are compromised**, hacked or stolen by an outside party. The thief uses the stolen information to commit identity theft.

The Federal Trade Commission's Top 6 Complaint Categories³

1. Identity Theft	13%
2. Debt Collection	11%
3. Imposter Scams	11%
4. Telephone and Mobile Services	7%
5. Banks and Lenders	5%
6. Prizes, Lotteries and Sweepstakes	4%

³Statistics: Federal Trade Commission, *Consumer Complaint Categories Report*, 2014

If You Believe That You Are a Victim of Identity Theft:

- ✓ Contact your financial institutions to place a fraud alerts or “freezes” on any affected accounts.
- ✓ File a report with local police/sheriff's department. Be sure to keep a copy, you may need it to correct your credit report or stop debt collectors from calling. 74% of victims do not contact the police.
- ✓ Call the Federal Trade Commission's Identity Theft Hotline at 1-877-438-4338, then dial “0” to reach a “live” consumer assistance representative.



- ✓ Call the Maine Bureau of Consumer Credit Protection (1-800-332-8529) and ask for information about file freezes. Only 7% of victims put a freeze on their report!⁴

What is a Credit Report?

A credit report is a record of your credit history. Among other items, it includes where you live, whether you pay your bills on time, and whether you have filed for bankruptcy. If an identity thief opens an account in your name, it will appear on your credit report.

Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act ("FCRA"), you can request a free copy of your credit report from each of the three major credit reporting bureaus (Equifax, Experian and Trans Union) once each year..

To get your report, you must submit a request by telephone, mail or the Internet. Be sure to order your free report to check for errors and possible cases of identity theft. If your family has a tradition of naming the new generation after the previous one, be aware of the potential for credit report mix-ups between similarly-named relatives.

Four Smart Ways to Guard Against Identity Theft:

- Always destroy/shred documents containing personal information.
- Never dispose of bank account statements or credit card offers in your garbage without shredding them first. Shred the envelopes too!
- Be aware of strangers near bank ATMs attempting to steal your private Personal Identification Number (PIN)
- Order your free credit report once a year from each of the three credit bureaus; freeze your credit file (see p. 9 for instructions).

⁴Statistics: 2006 Final Report on Identity Theft. Federal Trade Commission.

It is important for the safety of your personal information to stay updated on your credit report! Think of this annual request like a medical check-up, **except it's for your "credit health!"**

If you have questions about your accounts or have a dispute with a bank or credit union, contact the Maine Bureau of Financial Institutions. The Bureau of Financial Institutions regulates state-chartered financial institutions, including banks, credit unions and non-depository trust companies. Toll-free: 1-800-965-5235 | TTY: 207-624-8563.

Be an Alert Banking Consumer

Keeping current on your bank accounts is a powerful tool to help you detect identity theft. To protect yourself:

- ✓ Always check your bank statements when they arrive
- ✓ If you suspect a problem with an account, call your financial institution immediately
- ✓ Be careful whom you trust. Never give your personal bank account information to an unknown caller
- ✓ Report any unauthorized account activity to your financial institution
- ✓ Keep your bank account numbers (including credit cards), along with their contact information, in a safe secure place at home
- ✓ Order and review your free credit reports once every year

Maine's File Freeze Law

Safely freeze your credit files for free by calling these secure, automated numbers:

Equifax
1-800-349-9960

Experian
1-888-397-3742

Transunion
1-888-909-8872

Within two weeks you will receive a mailing containing your secret personal identification number ("PIN") and a toll-free number to freely lock and unlock your credit files. A file freeze is a smart step towards preventing identity theft!

Order Your Free Credit Report!

Call 1-877-322-8228 is the quickest method for safely obtaining (once a year) free copies of your credit reports. You may also make your request in writing:

Annual Credit Report Request Service
P.O. Box 105283
Atlanta, GA 30348-5281

Or online at:
www.AnnualCreditReport.com

Reverse Mortgages

Unlike traditional mortgages where borrowers make monthly payments to a lender, reverse mortgages allow elder homeowners to receive payments as long as they stay in their home (**primary residents only**). **A homeowner can give up a portion of their home's equity in** exchange for cash (lump sum, equal monthly payments, or a line of credit) that lets them maintain a comfortable lifestyle and afford daily expenses like food, utilities and taxes. Reverse mortgages are becoming increasingly popular in throughout the United States. Before taking out a reverse mortgage, interested homeowners must attend a counseling session to obtain all necessary information about the process.

To be eligible for a reverse mortgage all borrowers/homeowners must be 62 or older and own their home outright or have a high equity position. The homeowners remain responsible for property insurance, municipal taxes and home maintenance. The loan must be repaid when the **borrower(s) die, vacate, or sell their home. There are lenders' fees, and other significant costs** associated with this program. For additional information about reverse mortgages, contact:

- The Federal Trade Commission at 1-877-382-4357
- The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), toll free 1-888-687-2277, or write: AARP, 601 E Street NW Washington, DC 20049.
- The US Department of Housing and Urban Development at 1-800-225-5342 or the Maine field office in Bangor at 1-207-945-0467.

Chapter 3

Financial Exploitation of Elders: More Common Than You Think!

Financial Exploitation means the illegal or improper use of an incapacitated or dependent adult or that adult's (financial) resources for another's profit or advantage⁵.

- According to the National Center for Elder Abuse, five million elders are abused in the United States every year⁶.
 - Eighty Four percent of this abuse (emotional, financial, and physical) goes unreported⁷.
 - More than 14,000 elders are abused in Maine every year, and less than 10% of these cases are reported⁸.
 - Financial exploitation is often perpetrated by people elders trust: family, close friends and community members.
- These relationships are usually the reason elders do not report the exploitation — **they are ashamed or embarrassed, don't want to file criminal charges against the abuser, are in denial, or fear retaliation.**

Financial Exploitation and Debt Collection

Staff at the Bureau of Consumer Credit Protection are often alerted to situations in which a younger family member has approached an elderly individual to assist in paying off an account. Whether an elder chooses to assist an individual is a personal decision. Consider the effect assuming all or part of a debt will have on your financial position.

The Perils of Cosigning - Another Form of Potential Abuse

Why think twice about cosigning? The Bureau has received many calls over the years from senior citizens reporting damaging cosigner arrangements with younger relatives. One regrettable story involved a great aunt who cosigned a loan for her niece's sports car. The niece never made a single payment, took off with the car, and her great aunt was stuck with the bill. Think twice before cosigning on any loan. Remember, cosigners are 100% liable for the entire debt.

⁵Definition from the Maine Department of Health and Human Services *Adult Protective Services Act*; Title 22 MRSA § 3472 (9).

⁶2005. *Fact Sheet: Elder Abuse Prevalence and Incidence*. National Center for Elder Abuse. Federal Administration on Aging.

⁷Ibid

⁸2006. *Elder Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation*. Report prepared for Maine Department of Health and Human Services by University of Maine Center on Aging.

The Bureau of Consumer Credit Protection enforces the state and federal Fair Debt Collection Practices Acts (“FDCPA’s”). We receive more complaints about debt collection than any other type of financial issue! Debt collectors cannot call at times they know or can assume are inconvenient. Generally, this means collection calls can occur between 8 a.m. and 9 p.m. Collectors may not harass or intimidate debtors, and must verify debts in writing upon the consumers’ request. Debt collectors must also stop all contact if requested to do so in writing. For more information about your rights under the FDCPA, contact the Bureau at 1-800-332-8529.

Plan Ahead to Avoid Being a Victim of Elder Abuse

Forty percent of all elder abuse involves financial exploitation. Adult children perpetrate sixty percent of that exploitation⁹. An article in *Consumer’s Digest* suggests women are more likely to be financially exploited than men. Younger men are the most common abusers.

Although many elders wish to appoint their children to oversee their financial affairs, it is important to consider keeping family and financial matters separate. Maine State

When looking for a person to manage your future decision and finances, seek someone who is:

- ✓ Successful and respected in the community
- ✓ Responsible (can provide written, local references)
- ✓ Experienced in financial planning for elders

Warning Signs of Elder Financial Exploitation

- Maxed out credit cards/ unpaid bills
- Deteriorating living conditions
- Decrease of essential services (food, healthcare, heat)
- Bank account withdrawals by unauthorized family and friends
- Physical withdrawal from loved ones
- Unexpected change in payee, power of attorney, or will beneficiary
- Lack of knowledge about income or bank account balances¹⁰

⁹1998. *National Elder Abuse Incidence Study*. The Federal Administration on Aging.

¹⁰2004. Seth Blodgett, Maine Office of the Attorney General. Power Point. *The Impact of Financial Abuse on the Elderly*.

Government experts suggest elders seek and meet independent counsel — a person who is not family, a friend, or a health care provider — privately. This is one of the safest ways to ensure an elder is making their own decisions about the future.

One option is to draw up a legal document called a **Power of Attorney (“POA”)**. A POA allows someone to manage an elder’s legal and financial matters once they are unable to do so. themselves POAs can be as narrow or as broad as you would like.

You act as the “principal,” appointing a person to handle your personal matters. This appointed person is the “agent.” The principal authorizes the agent to spend principal’s money, sell property, or carry-out other legal or financial affairs on their behalf.

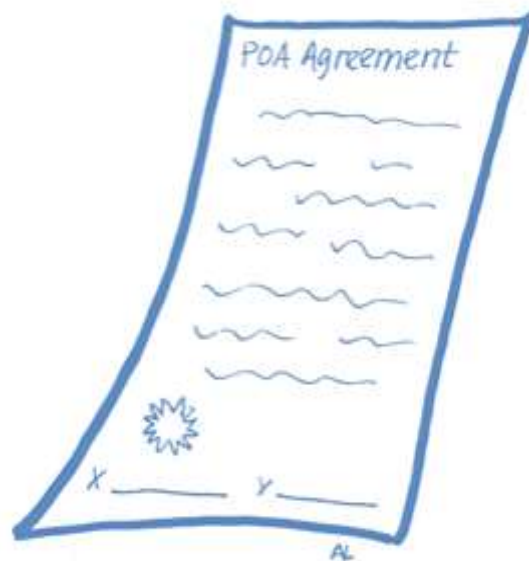
Agents that sign POA contracts should understand that the elders are not losing their rights. The agent is helping with an elder’s decisions. The agent must make all decisions in the best interest of the principal.

A Durable Power of Attorney is a power of attorney that remains in place after the principal has become mentally incapable of

making decisions on his or her own. POA contracts are only valid if the principal is mentally fit at the time of signing.

Sometimes agents abuse POA contracts, acting without consulting the principal beforehand. Bad agents sometimes justify these actions by claiming their behavior is the result of elder care-induced stress or the feeling they are somehow entitled to a reward.

DO NOT allow this abuse to happen. Think carefully about the person you are considering appointing as your agent. Make sure they have experience, can handle



ADVISORY

MaineCare is Maine’s Medicaid program that provides health care services to Maine’s low-income citizens. Friends, relatives or other acquaintances sometimes have elders transfer assets to someone else in an attempt to qualify for MaineCare benefits. This transfer can leave an elder with no money, completely dependent on State programs. These transfers are considered financial abuse.

responsibility, and can provide written references. If you experience or observe elder abuse resulting from improper POAs, contact Maine Adult Protective Services toll free at 1-800-624-8408 or Legal Services for the Elderly toll free at 1-800-750-5353.

No one is alone when it comes to financial exploitation. You should feel safe, no matter your age. Don't be afraid to reach out or speak up!

Bank Account Exploitation

Financial institutions train their employees to be on the alert for potential exploitation. An elder appearing with an unknown person, asking to withdraw all his or her funds in cash, is a classic “red flag” to alert tellers.

In 2014, an educational effort called Senior\$afe was launched to help enhance training of bank and credit union employees, and to raise public awareness of elder financial exploitation. For more information about Senior\$afe, call the Office of Securities at 1-877-624-8551 (toll free in Maine) or visit www.investors.maine.gov.



Bounce vs. Overdraft Protection

Many banks offer “bounce” protection on returned, bounced and NSF checks. Traditional overdraft protection extends a line of credit in order to cover the overdrawn amount. The consumer simply pays a finance charge. With bounce protection, the bank pays the overdrawn check and assesses an overdraft fee. The check is not returned, because the bank pays the check.

If You Are a Victim of Financial Exploitation

- ✓ Contact the local police/sheriff's department
- ✓ Contact Adult Protective Services in the Maine Office of Aging and Disability Services toll free, 24 hours a day at:

Voice: 1-800 624-8404
TTY: Please Call Maine Relay 711

To report abuse, neglect or exploitation in a nursing home facility licensed by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, call the Complaint Unit at:

Voice: 1-800-383-2441
TTY: Please Call Maine Relay 711

If you have a POA agent whom you feel is acting inappropriately:

- ✓ Revoke the POA agent immediately and transfer power to a new "agent"
- ✓ Begin direct deposit of any benefits into your bank accounts
- ✓ Contact Legal Services for the Elderly: 1-800-750-5353

or

Maine Office of Aging and Disability Services: 1-800-624-8404

Operators at the above numbers can answer questions about elder abuse and can help you make connections to caseworkers, the police, or the **Attorney General's Office**. The direct phone lines to the Attorney General's Office are:

1-800-436-2131, TTY: 207-626-8865.

Do not hesitate to call or get help!

Chapter 4

Insurance and Professional Occupational Licensing in Maine

Your Insurance Questions Answered!

The Maine Bureau of Insurance regulates the insurance industry in Maine. If you believe you are being targeted by an insurance scam or have a general question about insurance contact the Bureau of Insurance toll-free at 1-800-300-5000|TTY: Please Call Maine Relay 711. The Bureau of Insurance

publishes several brochures regarding auto, health, homeowners, and life insurance, including *Ten Things You Should Know About Buying Auto Insurance*, *Are You Eligible or Do You Have Medicare?*, *Contacts for Residential Property Insurance*, and *Ten Things You Should Know About Buying Fixed Deferred Annuities*. These brochures are available by calling 1-800-300-5000.

Get On Board the “SHIP”¹¹

SHIP is an acronym for Maine’s State Health Insurance Assistance Program. SHIP’s free services include:

- Providing information and answer questions about Medicare, MaineCare and other Medicare supplement plans
- Informing elders on their rights with MaineCare and Medicare
- Helping elders understand Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage
- Teaching senior citizens how to detect and report errors and abuse in MaineCare and Medicare.
- Helping elders to enroll in Medicare Savings Programs

SHIP services are available through:

- Legal Services for the Elderly, toll free voice and TTY: 1-800-750-5353 (additional contact information pg. 18); and
- State SHIP Office at the Office of Aging and Disability Services
Toll free: 1-800-262-2232 | TTY: Please Call Maine Relay 711

¹¹*About Maine SHIP*. The Maine Bureau of Insurance, 2008.

Licensed Maine Professionals

The Maine Office of Professional and Occupational Regulation issues more than 100,000 professional and occupational licenses in this state, including accountants, architects, electricians, land surveyors, manufactured housing professionals, plumbers, real estate appraisers and real estate professionals. Telephone: 207-624-8603 | TTY: Please Call Maine Relay 711.

Partial Listing of Boards/Commissions

Board of Nursing Home Administrators	Board of Electricians
Board of Real Estate Appraisers	Board of Pharmacy
Board of Chiropractic Licensure	Board of Veterinary Medicine
Real Estate Commission	Board of Plumbers
Board of Complementary Health Care Providers	Board of Nursing
Board of Licensure in Medicine	Board of Charitable Solicitations

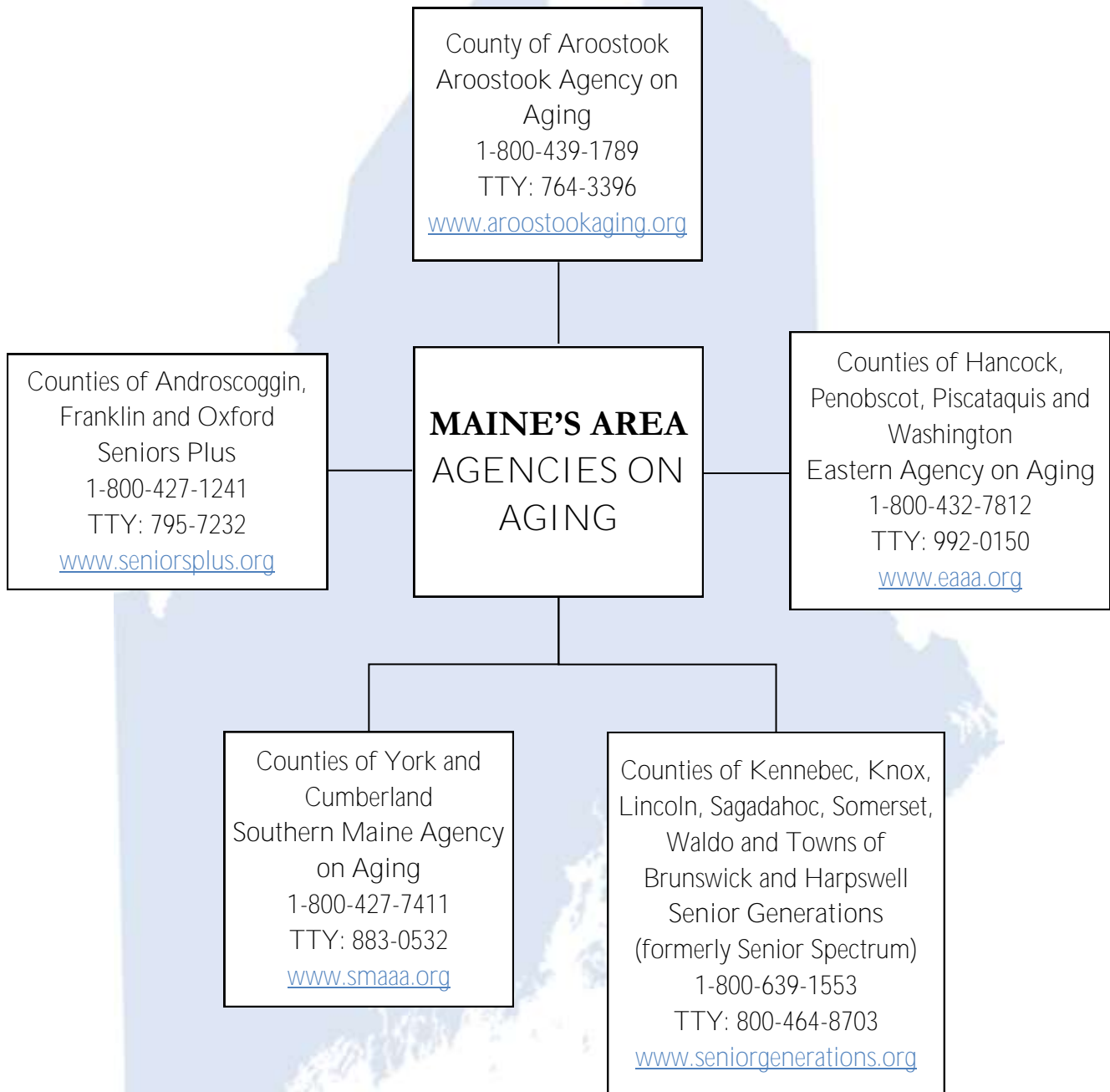
A Word About Hearing Aids

Good hearing should not be a source of stress for anyone. The Office of Professional and Occupational Regulation is an excellent resource for an elder who is thinking of obtaining a hearing aid. Hearing aids are available through licensed audiologists and hearing aid specialists, and can cost up to \$5,000.

The Office urges senior citizens to be savvy consumers and shop around for the best deals to maximize benefits for both themselves and their money. Elders are advised to get a second opinion and to fill out a purchase agreement before settling on a deal. Remember, hearing is precious, and you should be perfectly satisfied.

For questions, concerns, a history of complaint actions against licensed hearing aid specialists, or to file a complaint, contact the Office of Professional and Occupational Regulation at 207-624-8603 | TTY: 888-577-6690 or visit www.maine.gov/pfr/professionallicensing

Maine's Area Agencies on Aging were established to assist Maine's elderly population in continuing to comfortably live in their homes. Their services range from issues involving healthcare to heating to personal money management.



PUBLICATIONS

Be sure to check out other free booklets:

Downeaster Common Sense Guide: Credit Cards—Paper or Plastic? – This comprehensive booklet addresses credit cards: how they work, their responsible use, how to comparison shop for a credit card, when to pay cash, use a debit card or use charge card. This guide also provides advice on what to do if you fall behind on your credit card payments.

Downeaster Common Sense Guide: Debt Collection – If you are past due on your credit card, mortgage loan, auto loan or student loan, this is the FREE booklet for you! Learn about your rights in a consumer debt collection action, and how to deal with collectors. This booklet also provides guidance in spotting prevalent debt collection scams and contains ample “cease contact” and “debt validation” letters.

Downeaster Common Sense Guide: Automobile Buying and Financing – From calculating “how much vehicle” you can afford, to vehicle research, shopping for the best APR and deciding on the best loan term for your needs, this booklet is a comprehensive guide to purchasing and financing a new or used vehicle.

Downeaster Common Sense Guide: Gone Phishing – This guide is all about helping consumers defend themselves against being scammed. It details tactics and hooks used by scammers, offers advice to consumers so they can protect themselves, and explains how victimized consumers report can scams to authorities.

Downeaster Common Sense Guide: Credit Reports and Credit Scores – Learn the basics of credit, gain insight into how credit reporting and scoring work, and learn how to place a free file freeze on your credit reports with this publication from the Bureau of Consumer Credit Protection.

These guides are free to Maine residents. Out-of-state orders are \$6.00 each, or at a volume discount of \$4.00/copy on orders of 50 or more (shipping included).

To order, call 1-800-332-8529 (in-state) or 1-207-624-8527 (outside of Maine).

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Filing a Complaint

The Maine Bureau of Consumer Credit Protection administers state laws relating to consumer credit, debt collection, and other non-bank financial activities. To file a complaint online, visit our website at:

www.Credit.Maine.gov

Our office mailing address is:

Bureau of Consumer Credit Protection
Department of Professional and Financial Regulation
#35 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0035

Or, call our in-state consumer hotline at:

1-800-332-8529 (1-800-DEBT-LAW)
TTY 1-888-577-6690

Consumer Resources

Maine Bureau of Consumer Credit Protection	1-800-332-8529 TTY: Maine Relay 711
Maine Bureau of Financial Institutions	1-800-965-5235 TTY: Maine Relay 711
Maine Bureau of Insurance	1-800-300-5000 TTY: Maine Relay 711
Maine Foreclosure Prevention Hotline	1-888-664-2569 (1-888-NO-4-CLÖZ)
Maine Office of the Attorney General	Telephone: 1-800-436-2131 TTY: 207-626-8865
Maine Office of Aging and Disability Services	1-800-262-2232 TTY: Maine Relay 711
Maine Office of Securities	1-877-624-8551 TTY: Maine Relay 711
Maine Public Utilities Commission	1-800-452-4699 TTY: 1-800- 437-1220
2-1-1 Maine	2-1-1 TTY: 2-1-1
Legal Services for the Elderly	1-800-750-5353
Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB)	1-855-411-2372 TTY: 1-855-729-2372
National Credit Union Administration (NCUA)	1-800-755-1030
Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC)	1-877-275-3342 TTY: 1-800-925-4618
Federal Reserve Consumer Assistance Hotline	1-888-851-1920
Federal Trade Commission (FTC)	Toll-free: 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357) TTY: 1-866-653-4261
FTC Identity Theft Hotline	Toll-free: 1-877-438-4338 Press “0” to reach a live operator

Bureau of Consumer Credit Protection
35 State House Station | Augusta, ME 04333-0035
www.Credit.Maine.gov



Interested in a digital copy of this guide or other Bureau booklets? Scan to visit the Bureau's publications page. Mobile data rates may apply.