

OFFICE OF THE NEW HAMPSHIRE ATTORNEY GENERAL
CONSUMER PROTECTION AND ANTITRUST BUREAU

CONSUMER COMPLAINT MEDIATION PROGRAM

The Bureau

The Consumer Protection and Antitrust Bureau of the Office of the Attorney General enforces state and federal consumer protection and antitrust laws and regulations. The Bureau is a primary resource for consumers in New Hampshire who have questions or concerns about consumer transactions. The Bureau provides information, mediates consumer complaints, and may bring legal actions on behalf of affected consumers if there appear to be patterns of unfair or deceptive conduct by businesses. In these consumer protection actions, the Bureau seeks to stop unfair practices, and to obtain restitution for affected consumers. With respect to antitrust matters, the Bureau investigates potentially anticompetitive conduct and may review mergers and other transactions to preserve a competitive marketplace and resulting benefits to consumers. The Bureau may also bring actions to enjoin anticompetitive conduct.

The Program

Since 1992, the Bureau has enlisted and trained qualified non-lawyer volunteers as Consumer Affairs Specialists, to help fellow citizens resolve their consumer complaints. Consumer Affairs Specialists, working under supervision of the Bureau's paralegals and attorneys from space in the Attorney General's Office at 33 Capitol Street, Concord, answer telephone inquiries, provide brochures and pamphlets to callers, and mediate consumer complaints on a variety of issues.

With the development of new technologies, the world of consumer complaints is ever-changing. While complaints concerning motor vehicle purchases, leases and repairs often lead the list of complaint categories, followed closely by complaints concerning home repairs, debt collection practices and credit reporting, new fields of difficulties arise every day. Identity theft, and problems with internet sales, credit counseling and credit repair and telemarketing sales provide for increasing complaints, with new laws aimed at stopping abuses.

Consumer Affairs Specialists receive training on consumer protection laws and regulations, when and how to refer complaints to other agencies with more expertise or regulatory authority to handle them and how to mediate complaints through a process of letter writing and telephone contact. Paralegals and Bureau attorneys are available to offer information and assistance in handling difficult problems.

Bureau paralegals identify complaints for mediation, assign complaints to Consumer Affairs Specialists, oversee the progress of mediation, help Specialist to decide which form letters and approaches to use, schedule their shifts, track the results of mediation and answer questions. The paralegals also coordinate training and in-service programs, evaluate requests for enforcement action, and provide technical legal assistance to help them identify and resolve legal

questions that come up during the mediation process. In the course of mediating complaints, Consumer Affairs Specialists will receive confidential information about the complaint, and, from time to time, about the business investigatory activities. They will be required to properly identify and preserve the confidentiality of complaints and information learned in the mediation process.

The Volunteers

This year, the Attorney General's office will select 8-12 candidates to be trained as Consumer Affairs Specialists. Selection is based upon a written application and oral interviews. The Bureau attorneys and paralegals will select applicants for training.

Because Consumer Affairs Specialists will be acting on behalf of the Attorney General's Office and the State of New Hampshire, they will be selected based upon their willingness and ability to help their fellow citizens, their ability to address consumers and businesses diplomatically, their capacity to work cooperatively with the members of the Bureau., and their ability to learn consumer law and the procedures of the Bureau.

Consumer Affairs Specialists will be expected to commit to attend 20 hours of intensive training, to pass a test in finding and applying relevant consumer laws to a series of illustrative problems, and to serve as volunteers for six hours each week, for one year after completing their training. The program is open to all adults, and the hours for the program are normal business working hours.

The Bureau hopes to find and train a diverse group of individuals, from young adults to retired citizens. Persons fluent in languages other than English are encouraged to apply.

Please refer to the following pages for an outline of the position of Consumer Affairs Specialist.

CONSUMER AFFAIRS SPECIALIST JOB DESCRIPTION OUTLINE

A. Title/Position: Volunteer/Consumer Affairs Specialist

B. Goal of Position

To assist the Consumer Protection and Antitrust Bureau of the New Hampshire Attorney General's Office to provide top quality assistance to New Hampshire citizens who are seeking information regarding consumer protection matters and/or who have been found to have a complaint that is eligible for mediation.

C. Activities

1. Training

- a. attend intensive two-week training in substantive consumer law and procedural aspects of mediation program;
- b. pass exam on substantive consumer law and mediation procedures;
- c. attend weekly in-service seminars on more advanced topics of substantive consumer law;
- d. become familiar with contents of New Hampshire Consumer Sourcebook.

2. Telephone Response

- a. apply knowledge of substantive consumer law to respond to telephone complaints and inquiries;
- b. use resource materials and pamphlets to provide relevant background information to consumers making complaints or inquiries;
- c. prepare complaint forms and pamphlets/fact sheets for mailing to consumers;
- d. record data as required to keep accurate records of telephone inquiries.

3. Written mediation

- a. analyze complaints and correspondence from businesses and consumers;
- b. cooperate with VCAP coordinators;
- c. prepare correspondence;
- d. select appropriate forms from library of form letters in order to promote settlement of consumer complaints;
- e. maintain filing structure within files;
- f. receive and properly preserve confidential information.

D. Timeframes

1. Length of commitment: 1 year
2. Estimate total work hours: 320
3. Scheduling: 6 hours/week at mutually convenient times for volunteer and program.

E. Worksite -- New Hampshire Office of Attorney General
Consumer Protection and Antitrust Bureau
33 Capitol Street
Concord, New Hampshire 03301-6397

F. Qualifications sought

1. Willingness and ability to:
 - a. learn about consumer laws;
 - b. address businesses and consumers diplomatically;
 - c. work cooperatively with members of the Attorney General's staff.
2. Desire to help fellow citizens.

G. Benefits

1. Satisfaction of helping fellow citizens resolve consumer complaints;
2. Extensive education in consumer protection matters;

H. For further information write:

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