



October 2017 Tip of the Month

Credit Reports & the Equifax Breach

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Many of you who give your time and service through the Volunteer Lawyers Network (VLN) know that because of a partnership with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) the clients VLN serves have the opportunity to engage in FREE and CONFIDENTIAL Financial Coaching.

Financial Coaching is a client driven process for those clients who are motivated to work toward their financial goals. The Financial Coach acts as a guide through the process, a resource, and an accountability partner. The ultimate goal of Financial Coaching is for the client to make behavioral changes around their financial decision making. More information about Financial Coaching is found on the VLN website: <https://www.vlnmn.org/financial-coaching>

CREDIT REPORTS

Building and establishing good credit is a key component of financial wellness. What is on your credit reports can make the difference between being accepted or declined for a loan. What is on your credit reports can make the difference between getting a favorable interest rate and payment vs. those that are a burden. When you make a large purchase like a car or home lenders pull your credit reports. Good credit can save you money because lenders will see you as dependable and a lower risk. A credit report can also impact your Credit Score. The credit report can be a factor in getting hired for certain jobs. Even when it comes to getting insurance it may play a part. These are all reasons to get your credit reports on a regular basis. Check your credit reports for errors and any signs of identity theft. If you are concerned by something you find you can set up an appointment with the Financial Coach to talk about options.

There are three national credit bureaus – Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion. Each of us is entitled to a FREE copy of each report once a year. Get all three because they don't share information with each other. Your creditors decide which one or one's they report to. Note that there are many for free websites with similar names such as freecreditreport.com or creditreport.com. These services often sell your name resulting in unwanted advertisements for products you probably don't need. The following government sponsored website will not sell your name: www.annualcreditreport.com

EQUIFAX BREACH

An additional reason to get your credit reports is the Equifax Data Breach. Over 143 million Americans had personal information stolen from Equifax. You need to know if your information has been compromised and the options to protect your financial good name. The federal government has information available to help those affected determine what to do and how to prevent identity theft as a part of the breach.

The Equifax Data Breach – What to Do: <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/2017/09/equifax-data-breach-what-do>

Identity Theft Protection Following the Equifax Data Breach: <https://www.consumerfinance.gov/about-us/blog/identity-theft-protection-following-equifax-data-breach/>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For money management help and addressing debt issues I recommend “Behind on bills?” This booklet includes tracking tools, bill calendars, tips for setting goals, short-term strategies, prioritizing bills, and dealing with debt collectors. Copies are available for free at the VLN office or on the CFPB website:

<https://www.consumerfinance.gov/practitioner-resources/your-money-your-goals/issue-focused-tools/>

ACCESSING FINANCIAL COACHING

For VLN clients looking for a resource or guidance on financial issues on the road to financial wellness encourage them to call 612-752-6687. The Financial Coaching program is FREE and CONFIDENTIAL to help your VLN clients.