

VOLUNTEER CONSUMER COMPLAINT MEDIATORS

In the Consumer Protection Division
of the Maine Attorney General

6 State House

Augusta, Maine 04333

Telephone: 626-8800 800-436-2131
2003-2004

The Consumer Protection Division of the Maine Attorney General's Office offers, free of charge, the Consumer Mediation Service. This complaint resolution program is for the use of Maine business and consumers and is staffed by trained volunteers. All mediations are conducted over the phone or by mail, from the Attorney General's Office in Augusta.

The Consumer Mediation Service currently has 35 volunteers who have been trained as Consumer Mediators. New volunteers are trained in May and October. During the first week of the training program, the Mediators must attend a daily two-hour course in consumer law and mediation techniques. After this initial training, the Mediators are expected each week to mediate consumer complaints for five hours on a schedule convenient to them and also attend a 1 1/2 hour consumer law class.

Volunteer Mediators are expected to commit themselves to six months of duty in the Attorney General's office. Of course we realize that our volunteers' time is limited and that vacations and leaves of absence will be frequent occurrences. Training as a Consumer Mediator is designed to be a valuable background for persons considering a paralegal career.

The Mediators share offices in the Consumer Protection Division. As they mediate disputes between the consumers and businesses, they consult freely with our Complaint Examiners and, if necessary, an Assistant Attorney General. As our program has grown, four former volunteers have been hired as Assistant Complaint Examiners. In the last twelve months the Consumer Mediation Service has returned \$600,000 to Maine consumers.

Students at the University of Maine at Augusta can receive three college credits for serving as a Consumer Mediator in our program. Interested persons should contact the UMA office of Academic Affairs and ask for registration information concerning CEO-117, Consumer Law Internship.

The Consumer Protection Division has developed consumer law instructional materials designed for non-lawyers who want to enforce their legal rights. Each volunteer receives a copy of the 450 page *Maine Attorney General's Consumer Law Guide*. (Tower Publishing, 3rd Edition) The volunteers also receive training in the following legal areas:

1. Introduction to the State and Federal legal system;
2. The Maine Uniform Commercial Code and consumer's common law contract rights;
3. The Unfair Trade Practices Act, State and Federal law;
4. Warranty rights-express and implied;
5. Lemon Law complaints and used car complaints;
6. The art of mediation (Text: Fisher, Ury, *Getting To Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*);
7. Landlord/tenant law;
8. Deceptive advertising;
9. Illegal business opportunities;
10. Home improvements and door-to-door sales;
11. Credit sales and debt collection;
12. Mail order fraud;
13. Deposits and refunds;
14. How to be your own lawyer (and when not to be!);
15. Economic theory: government regulation, the free market and the consumer.

If you are interested in learning more about this program, write or phone Assistant Attorney General James A. McKenna or Complaint Examiner Gladys Guban Or you may e-mail jim.mckenna@maine.gov.

We look forward to hearing from you.