

How We Can Help



The Office of the
Minnesota Attorney General
helping people afford their lives and live with dignity, safety, and respect

The Minnesota Attorney General's Office welcomes hearing from members of the public. First, in many cases, the Office is able to provide direct help to consumers. Second, reports from the public alert us to problems occurring in the marketplace. The following provides more information:

Direct Assistance to Consumers

In some cases, we are able to help a person resolve a problem with a business by contacting the organization. We call this process "mediation." While the mediation process often results in successful outcomes, it should be noted that we do not license businesses and cannot simply order a business to take a particular course of action in a given matter.

Assistance in Locating Other Government Agencies

In some cases, we may assist people in locating other government agencies that may be able to help address, or that should be alerted to, the problem. For example, some businesses (such as banks, insurance companies, HMOs, debt collection agencies, car dealers, and many others) are licensed by other government agencies. In some cases, a licensing agency may be able to take disciplinary action against a company's license or even suspend the company's authority to operate. For these reasons, we often recommend that people also contact other government agencies.

Enforcement of Criminal Laws

The Minnesota Legislature has designated the county attorney as the official with authority to prosecute crimes in Minnesota and has designated the local police or sheriff's department as the agency with the authority to investigate alleged criminal violations. In addition, federal criminal agencies, such as the FBI, U.S. Attorney, U.S. Postal

Inspector, etc., have authority to investigate violations of various federal criminal laws. If you believe that your problem involves a crime that should be investigated and/or prosecuted, we encourage you to contact those agencies. Contact information for county attorney and sheriff offices in Minnesota is available on the Attorney General's website at www.ag.state.mn.us/Consumer/Government.

We Cannot Give Legal Advice to Individuals

We are not authorized to give specific legal advice to individuals or to act on behalf of individuals in private legal matters. If you feel you need legal advice and want an attorney to advise you, the Minnesota State Bar Association's Attorney Referral Service is available on the Internet at www.mnlawyerreferral.org. A flyer called "Hiring an Attorney" is also available on the Attorney General's website, which provides tips on locating and retaining an attorney.

Small Claims Court

In claims of less than \$20,000 (or less than \$4,000 for claims involving consumer credit transactions), you may wish to consider filing a claim in Conciliation Court in the event that you are unable to resolve the dispute. Conciliation Court is sometimes referred to as "small claims court." A brochure on the Attorney General's website entitled *Conciliation Court: A User's Guide to Small Claims Court*, has tips on how to file a claim in Conciliation Court. You do not need a lawyer to file a claim in small claims court.

Other Ways We Use Consumer Complaints

Reports from consumers help us to identify potential violations of Minnesota law and new problems occurring in the marketplace. In some cases, reports from consumers may help us build lawsuits against companies that we determine have violated our state's laws. In other cases, reports may help us inform the public about emerging scams or problem areas. We regularly monitor complaints to identify patterns and practices of unlawful activity that may provide a basis for an enforcement lawsuit. (Please note, however, that we cannot bring a lawsuit whose only purpose is to benefit a private individual.)

Consumer Questions or Complaints

The Minnesota Attorney General's Office answers questions about numerous consumer issues. We welcome your phone calls! Our phone lines are staffed by Consumer Specialists Monday – Thursday 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m, and Friday 8:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. You may call us at (651) 296-3353 (Twin Cities Calling Area) or (800) 657-3787 (Outside the Twin Cities).