

*Protecting Wisconsin Consumers for 75 Years*

## Filing a complaint

If you have a problem with a business that you cannot resolve alone, consider filing a complaint with the Bureau of Consumer Protection.

### Who can file?

We accept complaints from Wisconsin consumers and from out-of-state consumers dealing with businesses in Wisconsin.

Our primary focus is to ensure fair trade practices under Wisconsin statutes and administrative codes. We mainly provide support for consumer-to-business matters, rather than or consumer-to-consumer transactions.

Consumer-to-consumer transactions conducted online, at a rummage sale, garage sale, or from an individual's front yard, driveway, or similar are private transactions with little to no regulation or government protections. Consumers should be cautious with such buyer-beware transactions.

Resolving a dispute with the other party of a consumer-to-consumer transaction may require legal advice from a private attorney.

### When to file?

You may file a complaint with us at any time, but we prefer that you make a reasonable attempt to resolve the matter directly with the business before you contact us. Most businesses depend on satisfied customers, and reputable firms will typically make an honest effort to resolve problems but first you must let them know a problem exists.

Go to the seller first and identify yourself. Be calm, courteous and friendly. Explain the problem clearly. Be specific and reasonable as to what you want – replacement, refund or repairs. Provide copies of relevant documents, but **keep originals**. Listen carefully to the seller's explanation and what is offered as a settlement. You may have to compromise.

Do not be put off if the seller becomes upset or is difficult to work with. You may have to write a letter to the business in order to have the right person hear your situation. Keep your letter neat and concise. Be sure to include the following:

- Identify the product or service purchased

- Give the date and how you purchased the product or service
- Include all important details
- Clearly state the problem
- Give a brief history of the problem
- List attempts you made to resolve the issue
- Send **copies** of documents
- Give a reasonable deadline for them to respond
- Include how you can be contacted

### Why file?

If you are not getting anywhere with the other party in a timely manner, are unsatisfied with the resolution, or are unable to make contact with the company, we may be able to help. Some businesses are happy to work directly with the consumer, while others respond better after Consumer Protection gets involved in the dispute.

### How to file?

All complaints must be received in writing. You may file online, by email, mail, or fax.

Topic-specific complaint forms, like landlord/tenant, home improvement, telemarketing, and others are available online, by mail or fax.

When possible, file online by visiting our website at:

**datcp.wi.gov**

To the left on the screen, select "File a Complaint".

You can also call our hotline to request a form by mail or fax:

**Toll-free in WI: 1-800-422-7128  
(608) 224-4976**

Return the completed form with copies (**not originals**) of all documents supporting your complaint.

## What happens after you file?

Once we receive your complaint, it is entered into our complaint database in the order received and given a file number. That number should be on all correspondence related to your complaint.

We will contact you by mail once we have reviewed your complaint. Please know that it can take up to 2 to 3 weeks to review complaints.

We will attempt to contact the business about your complaint. Sometimes we are unable to find a valid business address or the business refuses to respond. Although we cannot force a resolution, our efforts often prompt the business to offer a solution to the problem.

We will inform you in writing when we get feedback from the business. If we decide your complaint should be handled by another agency, we will forward your complaint to the appropriate agency and send you a letter telling you where we sent it.

If we believe the business may have violated state consumer laws, we will include that in our correspondence with the business. In some situations, we may send the business a formal warning notice or start an investigation.

If, after an investigation, the violation is serious and widespread, we may recommend the case to the Department of Justice (DOJ) or to a district attorney (DA) for prosecution. Further action by the DOJ or a DA is their decision.

Our referrals may lead to prosecutions which can result in convictions, fines, imprisonment, or restitution to victims. However, judgments and money awards can only be made through the court system.

## How long is the process?

Our process takes time, and complex issues can take several months.

We can handle your complaint faster and more efficiently if you fill out the form as completely as possible. We encourage you to submit additional information in writing, but please do not contact us repeatedly for status reports. We ask for, and appreciate, your patience.

## Still not satisfied?

Please remember that consumer laws only provide protection in some areas. The Bureau of Consumer Protection cannot offer legal advice or serve as your private attorney. If your complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction, you may consider:

- Discussing your complaint with a private attorney.
- Taking action in Small Claims Court. Refer to our "Small Claims Court" Fact Sheet for more information.

You can contact an attorney by calling the State Bar of Wisconsin Lawyer Referral Service at: 800-362-9082 or (608) 257-4666. If you meet income requirements, you can also get low-cost legal services by looking up Legal Aid in the yellow pages of your phone book.

## For more information

For more information or to file a complaint, visit our website or contact the Bureau of Consumer Protection.

### Bureau of Consumer Protection

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Madison WI 53708-8911**

**E-MAIL:  
DATCPHotline@wi.gov**

**WEBSITE:  
datcp.wisconsin.gov**

**Toll-free in WI:  
(800) 422-7128**

**(608) 224-4976**

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