

# OFFICE OF CONSUMER PROTECTION

*The OCP's Year in Review*

December 31, 2017

## *Snapshot of 2017*

The [Office of Consumer Protection](#) (OCP) serves the [consumer](#) and [business](#) communities through complaint conciliation, investigation and enforcement, licensing, and outreach. While [CountyStat](#) provides some key markers of our performance measures during the last *fiscal* year, below are some highlights of our

*"In 2018, we look forward to interacting with you online, hearing from you by phone or email, or seeing you in person at our temporary location"*

accomplishments during *calendar* year 2017:

- Issued an unprecedented news release and video [warning about air duct cleaning coupons](#) which consumers frequently receive via mail, email, and social media.



## *Ensuring Integrity in our Marketplace*

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If you have been a victim of these scams, or if you have any questions about a merchant's activities, please contact the Office of Consumer Protection.

100 Maryland Avenue  
Suite 330  
Rockville, MD 20850  
Main: 240.777.3636  
Tip Line: 240.777.3681  
Fax: 240.777.3768

You can also file a complaint online by clicking [HERE](#)





- Warned County consumers and businesses about “[donation boxes](#)” in retail stores and restaurants and [provided information](#) regarding charity scams.



- Obtained refunds for consumers victimized by a longstanding “*theft of deposit*” scam in which a real estate merchant purported to sell and build new homes on the same lots to different consumers. These deposits ranged from \$40,000 to \$270,000 and were held by the unlicensed builder for up to two years.

- Initiated “[Language Friendly Hours](#)” and recruited bilingual volunteers to enable our office to better communicate and provide service to consumers and merchants who primarily speak Korean, Chinese, Spanish, French, and Russian. The OCP is always interested in outreach to other non-English speaking communities and invites [volunteer inquiries](#).
- Rescued hundreds of consumer items left behind at evicted [dry cleaners](#) and returned these items to consumers.



- Issued nine (9) [Consumer Alert](#) videos regarding common consumer questions and scams. Please visit [YouTube](#) to subscribe to our “*ConsumerWise*” channel for future alerts as videos are uploaded.



- Issued 17 criminal and civil charges regarding deceptive trade practices victimizing consumers in Montgomery County.

- Took an active role advocating in two workgroups before the Public Service Commission regarding the PC 44 Rate Design & Competitive Markets and Customer Choice Work Groups ([Case Nos. 9153-57, 9362](#)).
- Used social media to provide information to the public, including warnings about online dating scams, alerts on flood damaged cars which are expected to infiltrate the used car market, cybersecurity alerts, information on properly registered repair companies who fix your appliances and home electronics, information on the Western Union scam refunds, and warnings on holiday scams such as “Porch Pirates” and charity fraud. Please subscribe to [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) for more up to date information.



- Provided speakers, staff, and educational materials to forty-two (42) programs hosted by numerous organizations, including the Rotary Club, Vietnamese American Senior Association, MCPL Money Smart Week, Korean Senior Center, various senior Villages, A.S.K. Technology at Montgomery College’s Business Training Center, Jewish Community Center, Single Parent Conference at Montgomery College, Montgomery County Citizen Academy Alumni Association, Nuclear Regulatory

Commission, and Senior Forums organized by Councilmembers Sidney Katz and Roger Berliner. Please subscribe to [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) to get advance notice of future events or to see photographs or flyers of past events.



- Modified our webpage to provide a section highlighting “[Recent Scams and Alerts](#)”



- Responded to over 2,380 “Consultation Requests” from the public in which OCP staff provided information and advice to consumers, merchants and non-profits.
- Received over 1370 written complaints from the public and closed over 1430 investigations.
- Said good bye to three veteran [staff](#) members and one [volunteer](#) who *each* had provided the County with approximately **30 years** of dedicated service.

Same great service, new temporary location: While the Council Office Building undergoes renovations, as of October 10, 2017, the OCP has [temporarily moved](#) to 1451 Seven Locks Road (the old police station). Our phone numbers, email address, and regular mail address will remain the same.

In 2018, we look forward to interacting with you online, hearing from you by phone or email, or seeing you in person at our temporary location.

