

FY2017 Annual Report

Information Provided

of Inquiries Received (by telephone, e-mail, or in person)

FY	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	Total
2017	157	189	129	97	116	104	118	124	132	131	125	137	1559
2016	206	147	167	117	129	115	97	124	118	127	183	133	1663
2015	169	140	121	121	104	100	141	127	127	149	150	185	1634
2014	150	130	98	162	175	147	114	104	123	125	152	186	1666

Complaint Resolution

of Complaints Opened & Closed / Average # of Days from Open to Close

FY	Complaints Opened					Complaints Closed					Ave Days Open
	1 st Qtr	2 nd Qtr	3 rd Qtr	4 th Qtr	Total	1 st Qtr	2 nd Qtr	3 rd Qtr	4 th Qtr	Total	
2017	80	62	58	67	267	77	70	56	68	271	48
2016	81	65	74	75	295	84	62	62	77	285	40
2015	79	66	64	76	285	82	66	57	77	282	37
2014	85	44	94	95	318	87	58	63	111	319	40

Restitution Obtained Through Mediation

FY	1 st Qtr	2 nd Qtr	3 rd Qtr	4 th Qtr	Total
2017	\$39,841	\$18,434	16,813	41,182	\$116,270
2016	\$26,344	\$14,517	\$23,468	17,193	\$ 81,669
2015	\$11,331	\$16,684	\$10,638	\$81,899	\$120,551
2014	\$48,688	\$19,000	\$9,117	\$29,772	\$106,577

Education and Outreach

Education & Outreach Efforts

	Fairs/Public Events	Education Presentations	OCA Alerts and Press Stories	# of people and organizations on newsletter list	# Facebook likes
FY17	8	21	27	1747	230
FY16	11	28	37	639	214
FY15	22	27	28	480	196
FY14	11	22	17	390	191

Licensing Activity

Licensing Activity

	Peddlers/ Solicitors	Trespass Towing
2017	436	15
2016	340	14
2015	404	13
2014	116	10

Enforcement Activity

Date	Violation	Action	Result
12/23/2016	Application fee exceeded actual costs for processing. For applicants who were accepted, excess was applied to security deposit but for applicants who were turned down, excess was retained by landlord.		Landlord could not locate applicants who were turned down so \$8774 excess was paid to OCP for educational purposes in lieu of fine.
1/17/17	Trespass tow company failed to obtain license, towed vehicles without authorization, and towed vehicles more than 12 miles from tow site	Demand letter	Assurance of Discontinuance and Compliance, payment of \$10,000 fine
3/16/17	Trespass tow company towed vehicles without authorization, and failed to report tows to OCP within 1 hour of tow.		Assurance of Discontinuance and Compliance, payment of \$500 fine.

3/23/17	Trespass tow company failed to obtain license, towed vehicles without authorization, failed to report tows to OCP and HCPD within 1 hour of tow, failed to obtain proper signatures of tow slips	District Court Complaint	Awaiting trial
4/28/17	Landlord's improper calculation of utility charges using Ratio Utility Billing System	Civil citations	Awaiting trial

Highlights

Consumer Education

On January 18, 2017, the Office of Consumer Protection, Consumer Advisory Board and Howard Community College partnered to present “Know Before You Owe Student Loan Forum and Resource Fair.” The event featured a panel of experts who provided information on how prospective students and their families can make informed decisions on: how to finance higher education; determine manageable debt loads; shop for student loans; and avoid consumer scams surrounding higher education. Following the event, attendees were able to meet one-on-one with panel members and exhibitors and obtained resource materials.

Complaint Examples

Following the Ellicott City flood, the County evacuated residents from the affected area, including those who lived above retail businesses. Due to the damage to the roads, water and sewer systems and the pile up of debris, many residents were unable to return to their residences to assess damage for several weeks. When a young couple was finally able to inspect their apartment, they found that the retail area under their unit was still contaminated with debris run-off from the flood, which posed a health risk to the expectant mother. The landlord demanded that the tenants continue to pay rent for the apartment despite the evacuation order and continuing health risk. After advising the landlord of the requirements of Maryland’s landlord-tenant law, OCP convinced him allow the tenants to break the lease with no penalty and to return their security deposit in full.

A recent immigrant to the United States signed a lease for herself and four other family members who were due to join her about a month later. The tenant clearly disclosed that five people would be living in the unit selected. When the family members arrived, however, the complex manager claimed that it was illegal for five people to live in that unit, and said they would have to move into a larger unit (with a larger rent payment). County regulations, in fact,

indicated that the apartment was of sufficient size for five occupants. OCP's mediation efforts ultimately resulted in the apartment manager's agreement to honor the lease for the remainder of the term.

The Office of Aging and Independence enlisted the support of OCP when it found that a local nursing facility had redirected the social security checks of several residents to the facility when the residents failed to pay their monthly fees. While the facility had the legal right to take this action, it did not notify residents of the practice (or the process that would be followed) when the residents signed their lease agreements. As a result of OCP's intervention, the facility changed its admissions procedures to include verbal and written notice of the practice to all new residents.

A consumer contracted for the installation of a generator, relying on the representations of the contractor that the generator would work with the existing gas line. After the installation, the consumer learned that the contractor failed to verify this representation with the public utility prior to the sale and that the generator could not be used in his home. The contractor also failed to obtain proper permits needed for the job. After much research and negotiation, OCP got the contractor to refund the \$8000 price of the generator and remove the generator at no additional cost.