



NEWS FROM SCDCA

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

Carri Grube Lybarker, Administrator

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 22, 2016 | Release #16-005

Contact: Juliana Harris, (803) 734-4296

Average Consumer Debt Increased by 11% in 2014

COLUMBIA, S.C. – The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs (SCDCA) is releasing its annual report on consumer credit counseling organizations, outlining the state of consumer debt in South Carolina.

During calendar year 2014, credit counseling organizations distributed **\$35,182,461** to creditors on behalf of 10,233 South Carolinians seeking debt relief assistance. Although the total number of consumers with credit counseling contracts decreased by 24% from 12,701 in 2013 to 10,233 in 2014, the average consumer debt increased from \$15,578 in 2013 to \$17,544.

Consumers struggling with debt can easily become targets of debt collection scams. Fake debt collectors often increase efforts after the holidays, but these tips will help consumers avoid such fraudsters:

- **Ask for written notice.** Federal law requires debt collectors to provide you with written verification of the debt.
- **Contact the creditor.** Unsure if the caller is legit? Contact your creditor at a number you know belongs to the company. Explain the call and find out who, if anyone has been hired to collect the debt.
- **Beware of scare tactics.** Fake debt collectors may threaten to have you arrested or sued. They may also yell and curse at you and send correspondence with typos and errors.
- **Check your credit reports.** Your credit reports contain details about debts you owe. Visit www.annualcreditreport.com or call 877-322-8228 to request your report.

Credit counselors, which include persons offering to repair a consumer's credit, consolidate debt payments or assist in obtaining loan modifications, must be licensed by SCDCA. To check if a credit counselor is licensed visit www.consumer.sc.gov and click Licensee Lookup. To view the report in its entirety, click News Releases and Publications, then Agency Reports.

About SCDCA

The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs aims to protect consumers from inequities in the marketplace through advocacy, complaint mediation, enforcement and education. To file a complaint or get information on consumer issues, visit www.consumer.sc.gov or call toll-free, 1-800-922-1594.

###

