Credit Wellness Inc.

Consumer Credit Rights Guide

Understanding Your Rights Under the FCRA, FDCPA, and Related Consumer Protections

MyCreditWellness.net

Contents

Welcome

Credit can feel confusing — full of unfamiliar terms, rules that seem to shift, and information that doesn't always add up. You have real, meaningful rights when it comes to your credit reports and how companies are allowed to collect debts, and this guide walks through them in plain language.

This isn't about quick fixes or guaranteed outcomes — nobody can honestly promise those. It's about helping you understand where you stand, what you're entitled to, and where to go for help with a specific situation.

> **A note on scope:** This guide covers federal consumer protection law at a general level. State laws can add further protections and vary by location. When your situation involves a deadline, a lawsuit, or a decision with real consequences, the right move is always a qualified attorney — not a guide, and not an AI assistant.

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1. Your Credit Reports — What They Are and Your Right to See Them

A credit report is a record maintained by a consumer reporting company that shows information such as your credit accounts, payment history, balances, and certain public records. The three nationwide credit-reporting companies are Experian, Equifax, and TransUnion. Because each bureau can receive different information from different sources, your three reports won't always match exactly.

Getting Your Free Reports

AnnualCreditReport.com is the official, federally authorized website for requesting your free credit reports from all three bureaus. It's the only site you should use for this — be cautious of look-alike sites that ask for payment or unnecessary personal information.

- Review each report separately, since the three can differ.
- Never enter your credit-monitoring or bureau login credentials anywhere except the official site.

What to Look For

- Personal information that isn't yours (wrong name, address, or employer)
- Accounts you don't recognize
- Payment history that doesn't match your records
- Duplicate accounts or accounts that appear to belong to someone else (a "mixed file")
- Outdated negative information that may have exceeded its reporting period

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2. The Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA)

The FCRA is the main federal law governing credit reports and other consumer reports. It exists to promote accuracy, fairness, and privacy in the information that credit-reporting companies collect and share.

What the FCRA Generally Covers

- Who is allowed to access your credit report (a "permissible purpose"), such as a credit application, an account review, or a legally permitted employment or rental screening
- Your right to know what's in your file and to dispute information you believe is inaccurate
- Requirements for companies that furnish information to credit bureaus ("furnishers") to report accurately
- Rules around identity theft and fraud-related entries
- Your right to receive certain notices when a decision is made against you based on your report

Who's Involved

- Consumer reporting companies — Experian, Equifax, TransUnion, and specialty bureaus
- Furnishers — lenders, card issuers, collection agencies, and other businesses that report account information
- Users of reports — companies that request your report for a permissible purpose, like a lender or landlord

Credit Wellness can explain these concepts in general terms, but whether a specific company met its obligations in your situation is a legal question that depends on the facts — that determination belongs to a qualified attorney or the appropriate regulator, not a chatbot or an educational guide.

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3. Disputing Inaccurate Information

If you believe something on your credit report is inaccurate, incomplete, or doesn't belong to you, you generally have the right to dispute it with the credit-reporting company, the furnisher, or both.

How the Process Generally Works

- You submit a dispute identifying the specific information you believe is wrong and why.
- The credit-reporting company generally must investigate — often by contacting the furnisher — within a set timeframe, commonly around 30 days, though this can vary by circumstance.
- You'll receive the results of the investigation, and the report will be updated if the information is found to be inaccurate, incomplete, or unverifiable.
- If the furnisher verifies the information as accurate, it can remain on your report.

Doing It Right

> **Be truthful and specific:** A dispute should reflect what you actually believe is wrong — never a claim you know isn't true. Filing a false dispute, or falsely claiming fraud on an account you actually authorized, can create real problems for you. Negative information isn't automatically "inaccurate" just because it's unfavorable.

A dispute does not guarantee a deletion. Accurate information — even information you wish weren't there — is generally allowed to remain for its applicable reporting period.

If You Disagree With the Result

You can add a brief statement of dispute to your file, gather additional documentation and try again, contact the furnisher directly, file a complaint with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), or speak with a qualified consumer-law attorney about your options.

Mailing a Dispute

Disputes can generally be submitted online or by mail. If mailing, use certified mail with return receipt requested so you have proof of the date the bureau received it — this can matter if there's ever a question about the investigation timeline. Always confirm the current mailing address directly on your credit report or the bureau's official website before sending, since these addresses can change.

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4. The Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (FDCPA)

The FDCPA is the main federal law limiting how third-party debt collectors can pursue consumers. (It generally applies to third-party collectors and collection agencies rather than the original creditor collecting its own debt, though some state laws extend similar protections further.)

Generally, Debt Collectors May Not

- Use threats, obscene language, or harassment
- Call repeatedly with the intent to annoy, abuse, or harass
- Misrepresent the amount, status, or legal nature of a debt
- Threaten action they don't intend to take or can't legally take
- Contact you at a time or place they know is inconvenient, or after you've made a proper written request to stop
- Discuss your debt with most other people, like your employer or family, beyond very limited exceptions

Your Options

- You generally have the right to request debt verification in writing.
- You generally have the right to tell a collector, in writing, to stop contacting you (this doesn't erase the debt, but it can limit further contact).
- You can keep records — dates, times, what was said — if you believe a collector crossed a line.

> **Never ignore a lawsuit:** If a collector or creditor actually files a lawsuit, don't ignore the court documents or any deadline on them, even if you plan to dispute the debt. Missing a response deadline can result in a default judgment against you. Contact a qualified attorney right away — legal aid and bar referral services can help if cost is a concern.

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5. Identity Theft

Identity theft happens when someone uses your personal information without permission — to open an account, make a purchase, file taxes, or receive benefits in your name.

If You Believe You're a Victim

- Visit IdentityTheft.gov, the federal government's official reporting and recovery site — it will help you file a report and build a personalized recovery plan.
- Contact the companies where the fraud occurred as soon as possible.
- Review your credit reports for accounts or inquiries you don't recognize.

- Consider a fraud alert or credit freeze (see Section 6).
- Keep copies of everything you file and every conversation you have.

A local police report may also be appropriate depending on your situation — IdentityTheft.gov will guide you on when that's recommended.

> **Reminder:** Never enter your Social Security number, account numbers, passwords, or ID documents into a chat window — including Credit Wellness's own AI assistant. Sensitive reports like this belong on the official government site or with a professional you've verified directly.

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6. Fraud Alerts and Credit Freezes

Fraud Alert

A fraud alert asks businesses to take extra steps to verify your identity before extending credit in your name. It's free, and placing an alert with one bureau generally requires that bureau to notify the other two.

Credit Freeze

A credit freeze restricts access to your credit report entirely, making it harder for someone to open new credit in your name until you lift it. Freezes and un-freezes are free and are managed individually through each of the three bureaus.

Which Should You Use?

A freeze offers stronger protection against new-account fraud but requires you to lift it temporarily when you apply for credit yourself. An alert is lighter-touch and easier to manage if you're not currently worried about active fraud but want a precaution. Neither one lowers your credit score, and neither stops every form of identity theft — for example, a freeze doesn't prevent misuse of an account you already have open.

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7. When You're Denied Credit, Housing, or Employment

If a company takes an unfavorable action against you — denying a loan, a credit card, an apartment, or (in limited, legally permitted circumstances) a job — based on information in a consumer report, you generally have the right to receive an adverse action notice.

What the Notice Should Tell You

- That the decision was based, at least in part, on a consumer report
- The name and contact information of the consumer reporting company used
- Your right to get a free copy of that report and to dispute inaccurate information in it

Read this notice carefully — it's your roadmap to understanding what was reviewed and how to follow up.

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8. When to Contact a Qualified Attorney

Credit Wellness can help you understand general concepts, but some situations need individualized legal advice. Consider speaking with a qualified attorney promptly if you're dealing with:

- A lawsuit, summons, subpoena, or any court document with a deadline
- A judgment, wage garnishment, bank levy, repossession, foreclosure, or eviction
- Bankruptcy questions — filing, eligibility, or consequences
- Identity theft involving significant financial loss, tax fraud, or misuse of a child's identity
- A dispute you believe was mishandled in a way that may have broken the law
- Any question about how a specific law applies to your specific facts

> **Can't afford an attorney?:** Look into local legal-aid organizations, consumer-law clinics, law-school clinics, or your state or local bar association's lawyer referral service. Availability and eligibility vary by location.

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9. Official Resources at a Glance

- AnnualCreditReport.com — official source for your free credit reports
- IdentityTheft.gov — official identity-theft reporting and recovery plans
- consumerfinance.gov (CFPB) — consumer education and complaint filing for credit reporting, debt collection, and more
- Experian.com, Equifax.com, TransUnion.com — fraud alerts, credit freezes, and bureau-specific disputes
- Your state or local bar association — attorney referrals

Next Steps With Credit Wellness

This guide is meant to sit alongside the other Credit Wellness resources, not replace a conversation about your specific situation:

- FREE Credit Wellness Starter Guide — for building foundational credit knowledge
- FREE Credit Strategy Pro Consultation — to talk through your personal goals and next steps (book at guide.mycreditwellness.net/credit-strategy-consultation)
- Our website FAQ — for questions about Credit Wellness services, billing, and products

However you use it, we hope this guide leaves you feeling a little more informed and a little less overwhelmed. Understanding your rights is one of the most practical steps you can take toward credit wellness.

> **Final reminder:** This guide is educational and general in nature. It is not legal advice, and reading it does not create an attorney-client relationship or any relationship with Credit Wellness beyond that of an educational resource. Laws referenced here are federal and general; state law may provide additional protections. For advice about your specific circumstances, consult a qualified attorney.