

Consumer's rights to credit knowledge

Credit Ombud, Manie van Schalkwyk, reminds consumers that in terms of the National Credit Act (NCA), credit bureaux have certain obligations. They are required to take reasonable steps to seek evidence in support of the challenged information, provide any consumer who challenges their credit information with a copy of evidence supporting the information, or if the credit bureau is unable to find credible evidence backing up the information, it must remove the information and all record of it from its files.

There has been an increase in the number of complaints to the Credit Ombud regarding the difficulty consumers face in getting the correct assistance when trying to dispute the accuracy of their credit information held by the credit bureaux.

"Many of the complaints we received related to consumers at times not getting the relevant dispute reference numbers for dispute logged," adds van Schalkwyk. "At times, consumers were referred to their courts or their credit providers for assistance when disputing their credit records.

"Every person has the right to dispute the accuracy of his or her credit information and a dispute reference number must be issued to consumers immediately, whether the information was disputed telephonically or in writing."

He explains that the best way for consumers to dispute unfair or incorrect credit information listed on their credit profile is first to contact the relevant credit bureau and record a dispute by specifying the information under dispute and requesting a dispute reference number. The issuing of a credit bureau dispute reference number is proof that the consumer's dispute has been logged. The credit bureau must correct the information or resolve the dispute within 20 business days.

"If you are not satisfied with the outcome or if you did not get an answer from the credit bureau you can log a complaint with the Credit Ombud, this service is free of charge to consumers," adds van Schalkwyk.

In the event that your dispute is rejected by the credit bureaux, you should contact the credit Ombud. The office requires information from the consumer including the information disputed and reasons why you are disputing it as well as your personal details.

"It's very important to keep track of all your communication with the credit bureau, including written communication, the telephone number you used to call the credit bureau, as well as the name of the person you spoke to and the date.

"Our main aim is to ensure that innocent consumers aren't prejudiced by incorrect or unfair credit information held on their credit profiles and that credit bureaux respond to consumer enquiries as they are required to by law," concludes van Schalkwyk.

Contact the Credit Ombud on +27 (0) 861 662837 or www.creditombud.org.za.

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