

BE AWARE OF SCAMS

Sadly, there are companies looking to profit from you. Be aware of their scams and know what your rights are when dealing with your debt.

Companies that say they can help you pay off your bills might be looking to take advantage of you. They offer:

- “just one monthly payment”
- “get out of debt”
- “freedom”
- “better than bankruptcy”

Does this sound familiar?

NO COMPANY SHOULD CHARGE YOU TO HELP YOU WORK THROUGH YOUR DEBT.

Any company asking for money up front to help you pay off your bills is almost certainly scamming you. They're making promises they just can't keep. Most of their customers drop out because their program doesn't help.

The Bottom Line:

1. Debt relief services may leave you with bigger bills than before you started.
2. You could owe taxes on any debt that is forgiven.
3. These programs can make your credit score worse. That means you'll pay more for future loans.

Add it all up and you'll have an even bigger headache, and possibly even more debt.

Whether they call it “debt settlement,” “debt management,” “debt elimination,” or something else, they are taking advantage of you. Their services can end up costing you more money and damaging your credit score.

The information provided in this brochure is a summary. More information is available online:

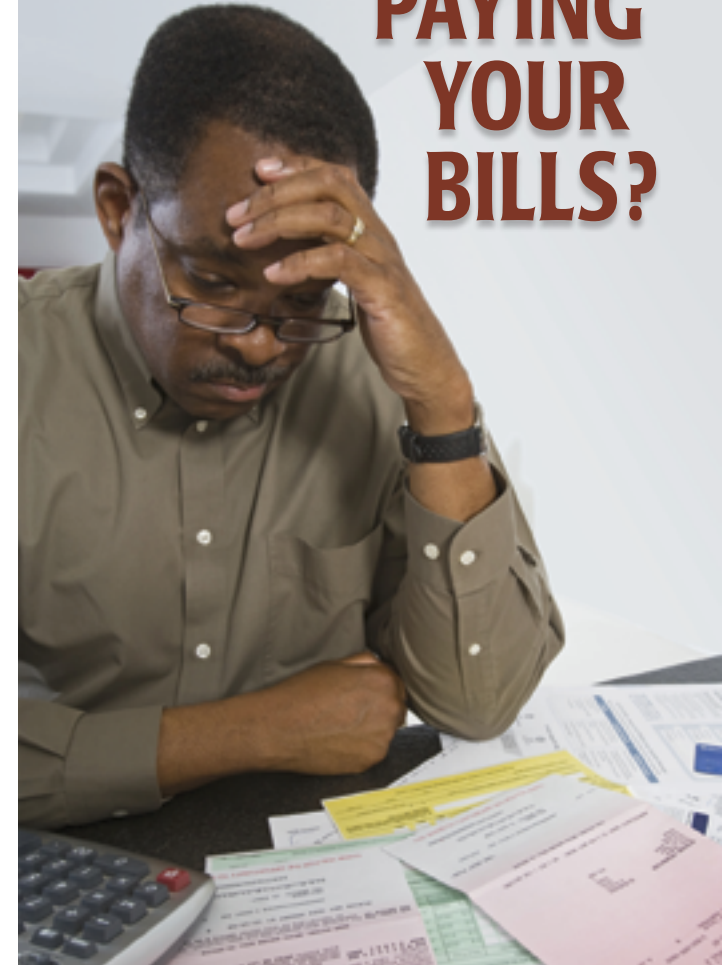
- www.ftc.gov
- www.nclc.org

Or contact:

- **Mississippi Attorney General**
800-281-4418
- **Mississippi Center for Justice**
601-352-2269
www.mscenterforjustice.org

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HAVING TROUBLE PAYING YOUR BILLS?



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CONSUMER
LAW
CENTER[®]

MISSISSIPPI
CENTER
FOR JUSTICE

IT'S EASY TO FALL BEHIND ON YOUR BILLS.

Job loss, illness and emergencies affect everyone. You are not alone. If you are behind in paying your bills, you may be contacted by a debt collector. If so, you have certain rights that protect you from harassment and false accusations from debt collectors.



► Can a collection agency contact me any time or any place?

No. A collection agency may not contact you at inconvenient times or places, such as before 8 A.M. or after 9 P.M., unless you tell them it is okay. Collectors may not contact you at work if they are told that you are not allowed to get personal calls there.

► How can I stop a debt collector from contacting me?

If a collector contacts you about a debt, you may want to talk to them to see if you can resolve the debt. If you don't think you owe the debt or cannot repay it, you should tell the collector.

You can write the collector to stop them from contacting you. Sending a letter does not get rid of the debt, but it should stop the contacts. The creditor or the debt collector can still sue you to collect the debt.

► Can a debt collector contact anyone else about my debt?

If an attorney is representing you, the debt collector must contact your attorney. If you do not have an attorney, a collector may contact other people—but only to find out your address, home phone number or where you work.

► What does the debt collector have to tell me about the debt?

Every collection agency must send you a written notice telling you how much money you owe, who you owe and to write them if you do not owe all the money. You must mail a dispute letter within 30 days after getting their notice. The collection agency has to stop its efforts until it responds to your dispute letter.

► Can a debt collector garnish my bank account or my wages?

Your wages or benefits usually can be garnished (deducted by your employer or taken from an account) only as the result of a court order. Do not ignore a lawsuit summons. You must file a written answer in the court clerk's office. If you do not, you lose the opportunity to fight a wage garnishment.

► Can federal Social Security be garnished?

Social Security and other government benefits are exempt from garnishment. Some federal benefits may be garnished to pay delinquent taxes, alimony, child support or student loans. If you receive notice of a lawsuit or garnishment, get legal help immediately.

► Harassment

Debt collectors are prohibited from harassing or abusing you. They are prohibited from pretending to be an attorney, law enforcement or government representative. Debt collectors also are prohibited from saying that you will be arrested if you don't pay your debt or that legal action will be taken against you, if it will not be.

► Who *can* you call for help?

If you've been harassed or cheated by a collection agency or debt relief company, contact:

- **Mississippi Center for Justice** 601-352-2269
- **Mississippi Attorney General's office** 800-281-4418
- **www.NACA.net** includes a list of local private attorneys who specialize in consumer protection.