Chief of the Month: Anne Infinger, Deputy Attorney General and Director of the Consumer Protection Division, Georgia Attorney General’s Office

Each month, the Center for Consumer Protection will provide an article about an Attorney General’s Office Consumer Protection Chief.

I have been a lawyer for thirty-nine years, the first twenty in the private sector and the last nineteen with the State of Georgia. After graduating from the University of South Carolina School of Law, I spent twenty years as a business litigator, the first three with a firm in Dallas, Texas and the next seventeen with a law firm in Atlanta. While I was in private practice, I represented a business that was being investigated by the Governor’s Office of Consumer Protection, (which is now the Georgia Department of Law’s Consumer Protection Division). During the course of that representation, I became familiar with the office and the Fair Business Practices Act. When I subsequently learned that the office had an opening, I applied for the position, first becoming General Counsel for the Agency and then Deputy Director. In July 2015, the agency was moved from the Governor’s Office to its more natural place under the Attorney General.

I enjoy the challenges and variety that I get to experience every day on this job, and I really love the people who work here. They are passionate about what they do, and they come to stay. We have relatively low turnover, which I think says a lot about who we are.

As you can imagine, I have seen profound changes in the world of consumer protection in my years with our office. When I got here over 20 years ago, the violators we dealt with were generally businesses that were essentially legitimate but had violated the law in their attempts to make a profit. Evolving technology and the world of the Internet have changed everything, with fraudsters now able to scam consumers through fake websites, spoofing software, phishing emails, bogus social media accounts and fake online dating profiles, all of which they can more easily hide behind. The Internet has also made it easier for bad actors from other countries to take advantage of consumers and evade law enforcement because of jurisdictional issues.

In response, we have done our best to grow and evolve to meet these challenges, expanding our work force and using online resources so that we can assist and educate more consumers. Our Intake Unit, which is comprised of telephone Customer Service Specialists and Data Analysts, has grown exponentially. We are currently receiving and responding to anywhere between 18,000-20,000 consumer complaints and inquiries a year. We have a Dispute Resolution Unit that
facilitates resolutions in many instances where we would not open an actual investigation but want to take some action in view of the concerning practices that consumers are complaining about. We have also increased the number of investigators and staff attorneys in the division. Our Lemon Law Unit has grown as well, and we have increased the number of matters we are administering. We have been actively involved on the executive committees of a number of multi-state investigations against some major targets, which has helped us get substantial consumer relief on a national level.

Another major focus of the office is recognizing that there are certain vulnerable populations out there that are subject to being taken advantage of. We try to focus our investigations on companies that go after these vulnerable consumers for example, those involved in credit repair schemes, unlawful debt adjustment or fraudulent schemes targeting the elderly. It pleases me that in so many instances we are able to stop those practices and get consumer restitution for the affected individuals. Last year we went against a major company that was offering illegal credit repair services to Georgia consumers and hiding under the guise of a 501(c)(3) organization. We were able to recover $1 million from the principals and keep them out of Georgia permanently. We also like to choose cases that will have an impact throughout the state, not just in major population centers.

I am proud of our office’s efforts in educating consumers and businesses. For ten years we have had a consumer blog entitled “Ask Consumer Ed,” which has been very well received. We also recognize that there are many legitimate businesses that actually want to do the right thing and want to be shown how to do it. That’s why we developed our “Auto Informer” newsletter, which is sent out to all the members of the Georgia Automobile Dealers Association and educates them about our rules and what constitutes an unfair and deceptive practice. In the last two years, we have made a point to beef up our educational resources geared towards older consumers, with the creation of our comprehensive “Georgia Consumer Protection Guide for Older Adults,” and increased outreach efforts to seniors. In response to the growing threat to consumers’ personal and sensitive information posed by data breaches and cyber threats, we recently created a cybersecurity guide for Georgia small businesses, non-profits, and places of worship.

I am a member of a four-lawyer family. My husband and I met in law school and have been together ever since. We have two children who are also attorneys. We love escaping to the mountains and spending quality time with friends and family. I also love cooking, reading, Broadway, and traveling.