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Inside this issue:

<i>News from the Director</i>	1
<i>Foreclosure Prevention Workshops Assist MA Homeowners</i>	1
<i>Consumer Affairs in the News</i>	2
<i>Plan Now for Higher Heating Costs This Winter</i>	2

Consumer Affairs Agencies:

Division of Banks

Division of Insurance

Division of Professional Licensure

Department of Telecommunications and Cable

Division of Standards

State Racing Commission

www.mass.gov/consumer

Massachusetts Office of Consumer Affairs & Business Regulation

THE CONSUMER INSIDER

News from the Director

As we wrapped up our first four foreclosure prevention workshops and look ahead to planning additional regional events to help homeowners this fall, I have been reminded how critical it is for borrowers to seek assistance as soon as they start to experience difficulty paying their mortgage. The homeowners who I talked to at the workshops were relieved to learn through



Daniel Crane, Undersecretary of the Office of Consumer Affairs & Business Regulation and Springfield Mayor Domenic Sarno.
Photo - Dave Roback/Springfield Republican.

conversations with their lenders that solutions are possible. They realized that they don't have to go it alone and that, in many situations, there are steps they can take to save their homes. If you are having trouble, don't wait until it is too late. Call 888-995-HOPE to talk to a counselor today.

Sincerely,

Foreclosure Prevention Workshops Assists Nearly 1,000 Massachusetts Homeowners

After failing on several occasions to reach his lender by phone, William Ryan of Springfield attended the first of four regional foreclosure prevention workshops sponsored by the state and local communities to give struggling borrowers a chance to meet with their lender. According to the *Springfield Republican*, Ryan was glad he did. "After leaving here, I can go home and relax," he said following a meeting with OptionOne. The lender laid out a plan to help make Ryan's mortgage payments more affordable.

Ryan was one of nearly 1,000 homeowners to attend events in Springfield, Brockton, Worcester and Lawrence in June and July. As the number of foreclosures increase across Massachusetts and the country, the Patrick-Murray Administration has launched a comprehensive response to the crisis. The workshops, organized by the Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation (OCA), are in keeping with the administration's ongoing efforts to preserve homeownership opportunities and stabilize neighborhoods.

"The key thing is getting them in the room with the lenders," said Consumer Affairs Undersecretary Dan Crane. OCA secured the participation of several national lenders and partnered with local communities and non-profits to make area housing and credit counselors available at the events. The workshops help to remove the primary roadblock to unnecessary or preventable foreclosure: lack of direct contact with lenders. Homeowners who attended the events learned that they were not alone and engaged in one-on-one conversations with their lenders about loan modifications and other workout options. OCA will hold workshops in different regions of the state this fall to protect more homeowners and more neighborhoods from the destabilizing effects of foreclosure.

Consumer Hotline: 888-283-3757 or 617-973-8787

Consumer Affairs—In the News

**** **August 4th** Joined by Secretary O'Connell and Commissioner Gillett, Governor Deval Patrick signed a broadband access expansion bill into law during a ceremony in Goshen, MA. The new law will leverage resources to make high-speed Internet available in the state's 32 communities that currently lack access. The expansion will be completed within the next three years.

**** **July 21st** The *Lawrence-Eagle Tribune* reported that 380 area homeowners attended the Patrick-Murray Administration's fourth statewide foreclosure prevention workshop. Borrowers met with lenders or housing counselors to explore ways to avoid foreclosure and stay in their homes. "A lot of people were very relieved," said Consumer Affairs Undersecretary Dan Crane. "They had positive outcomes or were on their way to positive outcomes."

**** **July 17th** The *Boston Globe* reported that Progressive Insurance of Ohio, the nation's third largest auto insurer and first new company to enter the Massachusetts auto

market in three decades, has sold more than 10,000 auto policies in Massachusetts since its May 1st launch. The company has hired 65 people in Massachusetts and plans to hire about 70 more by the end of the year.

**** **July 12th** According to the *Boston Globe*, managed competition has attracted AIG, the nation's largest insurance company, Vermont Mutual Insurance Group, Peerless Insurance and Progressive Insurance. Strong interest in the new system during its first three months bodes well for Massachusetts consumers, noted Insurance Commissioner Nonnie Burnes. "As companies learn about the success the existing companies are having, they'll join us," said Burnes.

**** **June 7th** Managed competition is lowering auto insurance rates and, according to the *Boston Globe*, homeowners premiums as well. The paper reported that competition for auto insurance business has led some companies to reward customers who buy both auto and homeowners policies with 3-20% discounts on their homeowners premiums.



Governor Patrick, Secretary O'Connell and Commissioner Gillett attend broadband access bill signing in Goshen, MA.
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Plan Now for Higher Heating Costs This Winter

Although heating your home may be the last thing on your mind amidst the summer heat, it would be wise to begin budgeting for heating bills now. Prices for just about all forms of home heating are on the rise.

Summer is usually the best time to "lock in" a home heating oil contract. However, with the volatility of the oil market, many heating providers are hesitant to offer contracts. Oil companies are providing budgeting plans for homeowners to spread out the costs of winter heating bills throughout the year. Contact your provider to see if there are any budgeting plans available to help manage your heating payments.

The following are helpful tips on how to keep home heating costs down this winter:

- Make sure you have a properly maintained high-efficiency furnace.
- Invest in Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs (CFLs) and ceiling fans.
- Repair drippy faucets and insulate outlets.
- Look for heating alternatives and/or supplements like wood-burning stoves/furnaces and wood pellets.
- Check windows and doors for drafts – make sure they are properly sealed.
- Close off unused areas of your home to prevent heat from escaping.

To assess how much energy you use and to take steps to make your home more energy-efficient, conduct a home energy audit. While professional energy contractors can complete an audit for you (and some utility companies provide the service for free), you can easily conduct an audit yourself. For more information on do-it-yourself energy audits, click on the link: [Do-It-Yourself Energy Audit](#)

To help Massachusetts residents cope with higher energy costs this winter, Governor Patrick recently convened a "Winter Energy Costs" task force. The task force will review emergency service programs and consider ways to reduce energy use in Massachusetts homes, possibly through programs to better weatherize homes and provide other efficiencies. The task force will also examine incentives for car-pooling and using public transportation and explore ways to mobilize community, volunteer and philanthropic resources to address service needs.