



Keeping Michigan consumers safe and informed!

Attorney General Bill Schuette's CONSUMER EDUCATION

Happy June. June is the sixth month of the year in the Gregorian calendar and one of the four months with a length of 30 days. June is also when many in Michigan celebrate the summer solstice—the day with the most daylight hours—which traditionally is June 21, but the date varies between June 20 and June 22, depending on the year and time zone. For mid-Michigan, the 2016 summer solstice is on Monday June 20 at 6:34 p.m. Mark your calendars.

This month's newsletter looks at the June tradition of weddings, how much they cost and scams to avoid; how to observe Alzheimer's awareness month; how you can assist the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's efforts to erase some the fine print in consumer contracts; and we continue our feel-good news story for the month. Finally, we've got some Consumer Education presentation news that is just too good not to share.

So before you tie the knot or get tied up in mandatory arbitration clauses in consumer contracts, read on ...

Have you ever read the paperwork for your consumer agreements—like your cellphone bills, credit-card statements, bank accounts, loan documents, or car leases? Buried in the fine print of many consumer agreements is language—that most folks never read—that may limit your opportunity to bring a lawsuit.

If a consumer has a problem with a company, this language says the consumer has agreed to settle any claim outside of court using a process called arbitration. Arbitration clauses started appearing in consumer agreements in the 1990s.

Arbitration is handled outside of court and is an alternative way to resolve a dispute where the parties agree to have their conflict decided by an unbiased third person after a hearing.

Consumer must individually arbitrate their disputes with the company. They cannot not file a lawsuit or arbitrate in a group.

In 2006, Congress passed the Military Lending Act, which prohibited the use of arbitration in loans and credit to active service members, and their spouses and dependents.

In 2010, Congress did the same thing for all mortgages and home-equity loans. The Dodd-Frank reform act called for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) to study arbitration and propose new rules.

In early May, the CFPB unveiled a proposal to keep companies from including arbitration clauses that block class action lawsuits in their consumer contracts.



The agency is seeking comments from the public until June 12.

To comment on the proposal, use Docket No. CFPB-2016-0020, by any of the following methods:

- [Electronically at the CFPB's website.](#)
- [By email](#), include Docket No. CFPB-2016-0020 in the subject line of the message.
- By regular mail, to Monica Jackson, Office of the Executive Secretary, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, 1700 G St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20552.

[Read more about this proposal.](#)



According to the [Old Farmer's Almanac](#), June is still the most popular month to marry, followed by August, July, May, and September. The Roman goddess Juno was the protector of women in all aspects of life, but especially in marriage and childbearing, so a wedding in Juno's month was considered most promising.

The [average wedding cost in the United States](#) is \$26,444. Couples typically spend between \$19,833 and \$33,055 but, many couples spend less than \$10,000. This does not include cost for a honeymoon.

The [average wedding cost in Michigan](#) is \$25,870 in the Metro-Detroit area, and \$20,290 in the Lansing/Grand Rapids area, which for an average 140-guest wedding means you will spend somewhere between \$145-\$185 per guest.

Wedding scams to avoid:

Nothing can ruin a wedding like a good scam. Findlaw.com warns of these three common wedding scams: 1) The Disappearing Dress; 2) The Gift Grab; and 3) Vendor Veracity.

The Disappearing Dress. Watch out for cheap replicas and fake websites offering too-good-to-be-true discounts on coveted designer or replica wedding dresses. Unscrupulous bridal salons may sell counterfeit, used, or damaged gowns as "new." Dress horror stories include bridal shops delivering the wrong size dress; delivering the wrong color dress or bridesmaids dresses; and, failing to deliver the dress in time for the wedding.

In 2014, an estimated 700,000 counterfeit bridal and prom dresses made their way into the country, costing U.S. shops over \$1 billion. That's why brides-to-be are encouraged to shop local, rather than online, and from reputable stores.

The Gift Grab. No wedding couple wants to think that one of their guests would pilfer their presents, but wedding gift theft happens, on average, at one out of every ten weddings. What can you do? Here are some preventive suggestions from theknot.com:

- Create an online registry;
- Place your gift table far from an exit, or forgo it;
- If you spot a wedding crasher, don't be polite;
- Ask a trustworthy friend to act as gift attendant;
- Consider hiring security; and
- Think about buying wedding insurance.



Vendor Veracity. This one can cut both ways. Sometimes a couple will pay a photographer who never shows up. And sometimes a fake couple offers to wire a photographer money just to gain access to her bank account. The point is, you need to verify who you are dealing with. The key to a sane, safe, and legal vendor-vendee relationship is to keep meetings in-person and keep your financial information private.

You should also do your research, check references, and check vendor records with the Better Business Bureau. And get every contract in writing!

Alzheimer's & Brain Awareness Month

If it's June and you are seeing purple, it is Alzheimer's & Brain Awareness Month — an opportunity to join the conversation about the brain, Alzheimer's disease, and other dementias. Everyone is at risk to develop Alzheimer's—a fatal disease that cannot be prevented, cured, or even slowed. During the month of June, the Alzheimer's Association® asks people to take the Purple Pledge and use their brains to fight Alzheimer's disease.

The [Greater Michigan Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association](#) offers the following ways you can participate in June:

- Take the Purple Pledge during Alzheimer's & Brain Awareness Month. [Go purple and use your brain to fight Alzheimer's disease.](#)
- During Alzheimer's & Brain Awareness Month, honor those facing the disease by [participating in The Longest Day.](#)
- Unite your faith-based organization or congregation through [Purple Sunday.](#)
- Educate yourself or invite a friend to attend our new program, Healthy Habits for a Healthier You. Call 800-272-3900 to find out when it will be held in your area or to request the program for your group.



If you are reading this newsletter, then you already know that it is important to be a savvy consumer who is aware of tricks criminals use to steal from you. Did you also know that the Attorney General offers **FREE** 45-minute seminars on: Identity Theft; Phone, Mail & e-Scams; Online Safety; Investment Fraud; Home Repair and Improvement; and In-Home Care & Senior Residences?

If you are interested in hosting or attending a presentation, you can find our registration form and calendar of events on the [Consumer Education website](#).

Since we started in 2009, we have conducted close to 4,000 seminars, and in April, we hit a record-breaking 100 Consumer Education Seminars in a month!

Schuetzte Files Ceases and Desist against Utah Fundraiser for 23 Violations of the Public Safety Solicitation Act

Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuetzte last month announced a [Notice of Intended Action](#) and Cease and Desist Order against professional fundraiser Corporations for Character, located in Murray, Utah for violating the Public Safety Solicitation Act. Violations included sending pledge forms to those who had not pledged and taking advantage of vulnerable call recipients.

Following a consumer complaint, the Attorney General required Corporations for Character—a licensed professional fundraiser under the Public Safety Solicitation Act—to produce call recordings and pledge forms to review for violations. The recordings revealed that Corporations for Character used sophisticated, pre-recorded messages controlled by a human operator that led call recipients to believe they were talking to a live person. Many of the recordings included unsavory and aggressive solicitation tactics.

Schuetzte reminds the public that some telemarketers keep 85% or more of each donation, and therefore, encourages donors to research their own charities and to give directly to the charity they have selected.

For more information, see the [Attorney General's 2015 Professional Fundraising Charitable Solicitation Report](#).

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