

Dealing With Debt Collectors

Your rights. Under federal law, debt collectors can't:

- Call before 8 a.m. or after 9 p.m., or at work if you tell them your employer doesn't allow it
- Threaten you, use profanity, or call over and over to harass you
- Lie about what you owe or claim you'll be arrested
- Pretend to be a lawyer or government official, or hide that they're a debt collector
- Tell your family, friends or employer about your debt (they can only ask how to reach you)

What to do

Ask them to prove the debt before you pay. Collectors must send you details about the debt. If you dispute it in writing within 30 days, they must pause and verify it. Use the sample letter on page 2.

Be careful with old debts. Debts past your state's time limit can't be taken to court, but a payment can restart the clock in some states. Get advice before paying an old debt.

Stop the calls if you want. Ask in writing for the collector to stop contacting you. This stops the calls, but not the debt, and they can still sue.

Keep records. Save every letter. Write down dates, names and what was said.

If you're sued, respond by the deadline. Ignoring a court summons usually means you lose automatically, and your wages could be garnished. Contact legal aid right away.

Report harassment. File a complaint at consumerfinance.gov/complaint or call 855-411-2372. You can also contact your state attorney general.

Court debt is different. Fines, fees and restitution owed to a court often aren't covered by these rules. Contact the court directly to ask about payment plans, reduced payments or community service.

Sources: Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (15 U.S.C. § 1692 et seq.); Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), Regulation F (12 CFR Part 1006) and debt collection resources at consumerfinance.gov/consumer-tools/debt-collection; CFPB, *Your Money, Your Goals: Focus on Reentry*.

1. Ask the collector to prove the debt (send within 30 days)

Date: _____

To: [Debt collector name and address]

Re: Account number [number]

I am writing about the debt you say I owe. I dispute this debt. Please send me proof that I owe it, including the name of the original creditor, the amount owed and how it was calculated, and proof that you have the right to collect it. Until you send this proof, please stop collection.

Sincerely,
[Your name and address]

2. Ask the collector to stop contacting you

Date: _____

To: [Debt collector name and address]

Re: Account number [number]

Please stop all contact with me about this debt. You may only contact me to confirm you will stop, or to tell me about a specific action, such as a lawsuit.

Sincerely,
[Your name and address]

Tips: Keep a copy of each letter. Send it by certified mail with a return receipt so you have proof it arrived. Never send original documents.