

## Rental Housing On Line

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### NOTICE TO USERS OF CONSUMER REPORTS: OBLIGATIONS OF USERS UNDER THE FCRA

The Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) requires that this notice be sent to inform users of consumer reports of their legal obligations. State law may impose additional requirements. This first section of this summary sets forth the responsibilities imposed by the FCRA on all users of consumer reports. The subsequent sections discuss the duties of users of reports that contain specific types of information, or that are used for certain purposes, and the legal consequences of violations. The FCRA, 15 U.S.C. 1681-1681u, is set forth in full at the Federal Trade Commission's Internet web site (<http://www.ftc.gov>).

#### 1. OBLIGATIONS OF ALL USERS OF CONSUMER REPORTS

##### A. Users Must Have a Permissible Purpose

Congress has limited the use of consumer reports to protect consumers' privacy. All users must have a permissible purpose under the FCRA to obtain a consumer report. Section 604 of the FCRA contains a list of the permissible purposes under the law. These are:

As ordered by a court or a federal grand jury subpoena. Section 604 (a) (1)

As instructed by the consumer in writing. Section 604 (a) (2)

For the extension of credit as a result of an application from a consumer, or the review or collection of a consumer's account. Section 604 (a) (3) (A)

For employment purposes, including hiring and promotion decisions, where the consumer has given written permission. Sections 604(a)(3)(B) and 604(b)

For the underwriting of insurance as a result of an application from a consumer. Section 604(a)(3)(C)

When there is a legitimate business need, in connection with a business transaction that is initiated by the consumer. Section 604(a)(3) XFA)

To review a consumer's account to determine whether the consumer continues to meet the terms of the account. Section 604(a)(F)(ii)

To determine a consumer's eligibility for a license or other benefit granted by a governmental instrumentality required by law to consider an applicant's financial responsibility or status. Section 604(a)(3)(D)

For use by a potential investor or servicer, or current insurer, in a valuation or an assessment of the credit or prepayment risks associated with an existing credit obligation. Section 604 (a) (3) (E)

For use by state and local officials in connection with the determination of child support payments, or modifications and enforcement thereof. Sections 604 (a) (4) and 604 (a) (5)

In addition, creditors and insurers may obtain certain consumer report information for the purpose of making unsolicited offers of credit or insurance. The particular obligations of users of this "prescreened" information are described in Section V below.

##### B. Users Must Provide Certifications

Section 604 (f) of the FCRA prohibits any person from obtaining a consumer report from a consumer reporting agency (CRA) unless the person has certified to the CRA (by a general or specific certification, as appropriate) the permissible purpose (s) for which the report is being obtained and certifies that the report will not be used for any other purpose.

### **C. Users Must Notify Consumers When Adverse Actions Are Taken**

The term "adverse action" is defined very broadly by Section 603 of the FCRA. "Adverse actions" include all business, credit, and employment actions affecting consumers that can be considered to have a negative impact-such as unfavorably changing credit or contract terms or conditions, denying or canceling credit or insurance, offering credit on less favorable terms than requested, or denying employment or promotion.

#### **1. Adverse Actions Based on Information Obtained From a CRA**

If a user takes any type of adverse action that is based at least in part on information contained in a consumer report, the user is required by Section 615(a) of the FCRA to notify the consumer. The notification may be done in writing, orally, or by electronic means. It must include the following:

The name, address, and telephone number of the CRA (including a toll-free telephone number, if it is a nationwide CRA) that provided the report.

- statement that the CRA did not make the adverse decision and is not able to explain why the decision was made.
- statement setting forth the consumer's right to obtain a free disclosure of the consumer's file from the CRA if the consumer requests the report within 60 days.

A statement setting forth the consumer's right to dispute directly with the CRA the accuracy or completeness of any information provided by the CRA.

#### **2. Adverse Actions Based on Information Obtained From Third Parties Who Are Not Consumer Reporting Agencies**

If a person denies (or increases the charge for) credit for personal, family, or household purposes based either wholly or partly upon information from a person other than a CRA, and the information is the type of consumer information covered by the FCRA, Section 615 (b) (1) of the FCRA requires that the user clearly and accurately disclose to the consumer his or her right to obtain disclosure of the nature of the information that was relied upon by making a written request within 60 days of notification. The user must provide the disclosure within a reasonable period of time following the consumer's written request.

#### **3. Adverse Actions Based on Information Obtained From Affiliates**

If a person takes an adverse action involving credit, insurance, employment, or a credit transaction initiated by the consumer, based on information of the type covered by the FCRA, and this information was obtained from an entity affiliated with the user of the information by common ownership or control, Section 615(b)(2) requires the user to notify the consumer of the adverse action. The notification must inform the consumer that he or she may obtain a disclosure of the nature of the information relied upon by making a written request within 60 days of receiving the adverse action notice. If the consumer makes such a request, the user must disclose the nature of the information not later than 30 days after receiving the request. (Information that is obtained directly from an affiliated entity relating solely to its transactions or experiences with the consumer, and information from a consumer report obtained from an affiliate are not covered by Section 615(b)(2).

## **II. OBLIGATIONS OF USERS WHEN CONSUMER REPORTS ARE OBTAINED FOR EMPLOYMENT PURPOSES**

If information from a CRA is used for employment purposes, the user has specific duties, which are set forth in Section 604 (b) of the FCRA. The user must:

Make a clear and conspicuous written disclosure to the consumer before the report is obtained, in a document that consists solely of the disclosure, that a consumer report may be obtained.

Obtain prior written authorization from the consumer.

Certify to the CRA that the above steps have been followed, that the information being obtained will not be used in violation of any federal or state equal opportunity law or regulation, and that, if any adverse action is to be taken based on the consumer report, a copy of the report and a summary of the consumer's rights will be provided to the consumer.

Before taking an adverse action, provide a copy of the report to the consumer as well as the summary of the consumer's rights. (The user should receive this summary from the CRA, because Section 604 (b) (1) (B) of the FCRA requires CRAs to provide a copy of the summary with each consumer report obtained for employment purposes.)

**Sections III, IV, V, & VI relate to certain types of credit reports (investigative or medical), prescreened lists, or resellers. They do not apply to tenant screening so we have not included them here. Any person wanting a copy of these sections may print them from the Act.**

### **III. OBLIGATIONS OF USERS OF INVESTIGATIVE CONSUMER REPORTS**

### **IV. OBLIGATIONS OF USERS OF CONSUMER REPORTS CONTAINING MEDICAL INFORMATION**

### **V. OBLIGATIONS OF USERS OF "PRESCREENED" LISTS**

### **VI. OBLIGATIONS OF RESELLERS**

### **VII. LIABILITY FOR VIOLATIONS OF THE FCRA**

Failure to comply with the FCRA can result in state or federal enforcement actions, as well as private lawsuits. *Sections 616, 617, and 621.* In addition, any person who knowingly and willfully obtains a consumer report under false pretenses may face criminal prosecution. *Section 619*