Chief of the Month: Bridgette Wiggins, Mississippi

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

I consider it a tremendous honor to serve as February’s Consumer Chief of the Month. I first joined the Mississippi Attorney General’s Office in September 1996, after working in private practice for three years with a Jackson law firm that focused primarily on plaintiff’s work. I was hired by former Attorney General Mike Moore and twenty-one years later, it is my pleasure to serve under the leadership of Attorney General Jim Hood.

My first assignment with the office was in the Human Services Division which, among other things, is tasked with the responsibility of representing the Mississippi Department of Human Services in termination of parental rights actions, freeing children in foster care for adoption. This assignment required constant traveling across the State of Mississippi. Thus, after the birth of my second child in 2002 (the first born three years earlier in 1999) when I was presented with the opportunity to join the Consumer Protection Division, I welcomed the new experience.

I have been the Director of the Consumer Protection Division for approximately four years. I have the extreme fortune of working with an amazing group of people. I supervise a team of attorneys, law-enforcement certified investigators, mediators, and support staff. This team does the impossible every day. Like most consumer protection divisions, we serve the public in three distinct areas: education, advocacy, and enforcement.

With consumer education, we seek to create an informed public with the goal of arming them with tools that can be used to help consumers avoid problems before they occur. Every member of the division actively participates in presenting programs to consumers across the state which includes the distribution of educational literature on consumer rights and concerns.

We are now in the process of planning our 12th annual Community Shred Day. This is an event held across the state to increase awareness regarding the risks of identity theft and provide consumers with free access to document shredding. Since beginning this service, we have helped Mississippi consumers shred more than 546,000 pounds of paper containing personal information.
We recently released two new consumer guides. The first was produced after the Mississippi Public Service Commission issued a rule allowing net metering in the state. We created “A Consumer’s Guide to Solar Power in Mississippi” in an effort to protect consumers in this new area. The guide provides information explaining the net metering process, the basics of solar energy, and the related financing options. Additionally, after convening the Mississippi Auto Repair Task Force, we created the “Consumer’s Guide to Insurance and Auto Body Repair.” This guide addresses what consumers should expect from their insurance companies and auto body repair shops, how to choose a shop, and the different types of repair costs and warranties.

With regard to advocacy, our mediators and support staff serve as our front line by fielding thousands of calls and emails each year. In 2017, we responded to approximately 48,142 calls for assistance. Additionally, our mediators handle a wide range of consumer complaints, seeking to remedy these disputes in the consumer’s favor, when possible.

We enforce our Consumer Protection Act both civilly and criminally. In addition to our unfair and deceptive trade practices actions, we also investigate and prosecute antitrust matters, identity theft, home repair fraud, and intellectual property crimes. In 2017, we opened seventy new identity theft cases and made fifteen identify theft arrests. We also made six intellectual property crimes arrests, and ten additional arrests for consumer protection related crimes that were charged as mail fraud, wire fraud, and/or false pretense.

I stated earlier that I was very fortunate to work every day with an amazing group of people. Because our division is so small, it is very much like a family. My husband Tommy and I are both from Louisiana with no family of our own in Mississippi. Thus, my extended family here at the attorney general’s office has been an absolute blessing. Tommy and I have been married for twenty-one years and we are the proud parents of two daughters, Tierra and Tyler, and one son, Kristian.