After Equifax, What’s Next?

On Sept. 7, 2017, the reality of our modern financial system became clearer than ever before when the credit bureau Equifax announced it had been hacked, potentially compromising the personal data of 143 million Americans (later updated to 148.5 million).

Since then, our advocates in Massachusetts and nationwide have worked to persuade Equifax, Congress and state lawmakers to take stronger action to protect consumers from identity theft and fraud.

Last fall, MASSPIRG Legislative Director Deirdre Cummings testified on Beacon Hill in support of a bill that would make it easier for Massachusetts consumers to protect themselves from identity theft by eliminating the fees charged by credit bureaus to “freeze” or “thaw” their credit reports.

We did not give the credit bureaus permission to collect our information, sell it or, in the case of Equifax, lose it. So why should we have to pay to control access to our reports?

Consumers Need Control

That’s why our national network has led the push for free credit freezes for all Americans. When Congress held hearings to investigate Equifax’s wrongdoing, our advocates Ed Mierzwinski and Mike Litt testified in support of stronger federal consumer protections, including free credit freezes.

Our partner organizations are also working on similar efforts to pass free freeze bills at the state level in California, Illinois, Colorado and other states.

We’re going to keep getting the media to cover this important story, and send critical resources to the people who are most likely to be affected by identity theft as a result of the data breach—including members of the armed forces, senior citizens and students.

With your support, we won’t let up until Equifax is held fully responsible and consumers have strong protections against identity theft in place.

Standing Up For Our Consumer Watchdog

Six years ago, MASSPIRG helped create the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to make sure banks and financial companies treat us fairly and play by the rules. Since then, the bureau has returned nearly $12 billion to ripped-off consumers.

Yet President Trump and some in Congress are trying to strip away vital consumer protections, and even eliminate the Consumer Bureau. That’s why we knocked on more than 300,000 doors across the country last summer, mobilizing more than 60,000 citizens to sign our petition to Congress.

In November, when Richard Cordray stepped down as director of the Consumer Bureau and the president named staunch CFPB opponent Mick Mulvaney as acting director, we doubled down on our efforts to ensure the agency stays strong and independent. With support from members like you, we’ll fight tooth and nail to ensure this important agency continues to thrive in the future.
Transportation

MBTA Reliability Reporting Is Flawed

Making mass transit reliable should be a priority, so the metrics that track reliability need to be accurate.

This fall, MASSPIRG Education Fund found the MBTA’s “Wait Time Reliability” metric only measures the amount of time riders wait for trains to enter the station—it doesn’t account for on-time performance, in-route service disruptions or overcrowding.

“ar it’s as if the Patriots were defining their season’s success based only on the number of points they scored, and not on wins and losses,” said MASSPIRG Education Fund Staff Attorney Matt Casale. “For the most part, riders just want to know how long it’s going to take them to get somewhere, when their train is coming, and if there are any problems along the route.”

In our report, titled “How Reliable Is The T?,” we recommended the MBTA take a more comprehensive approach to measuring reliability that would result in statistics that better measures things riders care about.

Public Health

We’re Making Progress On Protecting Antibiotics

Fourteen of the top 25 chain restaurants in the U.S. have taken steps to restrict the routine use of antibiotics in the chicken they serve, according to a scorecard released in September by MASSPIRG Education Fund and our allies.

The third annual Chain Reaction report, which grades companies on their antibiotics policies and practices, found that while restaurant chains made great progress on chicken, there were no new commitments to limit antibiotic use in beef and pork.

With support from our members, we’ll continue encouraging the largest chains in these industries to act to protect public health.

Consumer Protection

MASSPIRG Finds Carmax Selling Unsafe Cars

A report released by MASSPIRG Education Fund in September found CarMax—the nation’s largest used car retailer—has more than doubled the percentage of dangerous, defective cars for sale to consumers.

“Over the last two years, CarMax has expanded across the state,” said Deirdre Cummings, consumer program director for MASSPIRG Education Fund. “Meanwhile, our survey found one in four of their cars for sale is unsafe. No one should have to gamble with their safety or the safety of those who share the roadways.”

The report and its recommendations were based on a survey of nearly 1,700 vehicles for sale at eight CarMax locations—including four in Massachusetts. Researches found all eight locations were selling numerous vehicles recalled for safety reasons that had yet to be repaired.

Toxics

Pesticides Shouldn’t Threaten Our Health

Any chemical or pesticide that is sprayed on our food or around our schools should be proven safe. But two of the most widely used pesticides, Monsanto’s Roundup and dicamba, are putting our health at risk and destroying farmers’ crops.

Roundup, which has been linked to cancer, is showing up in foods like corn, soy, cereal and even ice cream, and dicamba damaged more than 3.1 million acres of crops in 2017. We can’t count on the current EPA to protect our health, so it’s up to Massachusetts to stop the use of these dangerous and damaging chemicals unless and until they can be proven safe.

Invest fossil fuel free. Because her future matters.

Download our FREE guide to get started at www.greencentury.com/myguide
Protecting Children From Dangerous Products

We need to protect our children from unsafe toys. For more than 30 years, MASSPIRG Education Fund has worked hard to identify toys that threaten our children, call on manufacturers and regulators to take important actions, and inform parents and caregivers of the dangers that could be in their homes.

Lead In Fidget Spinners

Last fall, our researchers made a particularly alarming discovery when we tested fidget spinners for lead: We found two fidget spinners from Target that had up to 300 times the legal limit for lead in children’s products.

We immediately called on Target to remove the toxic spinners from its website and stores, and spread the word through major media outlets, including CBS and The Washington Post. Within days of releasing our test results, Target removed the two fidget spinners from its shelves.

Now, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), Target and the manufacturer Bulls i Toy need to ensure that these two fidget spinners are fully recalled.

32nd Annual Toy Report

In November, MASSPIRG Education Fund visited Floating Hospital For Children at Tufts Medical Center to release our 32nd annual Trouble In Toyland report.

This year, we found that stores nationwide are still offering dangerous and toxic toys and, in some cases, ignoring explicit government safety regulations in the process.

In addition to exposing fidget spinners full of lead, the report found inadequately-labeled toys and balloons that pose a choking hazard, and data-collecting toys that may violate children’s privacy and other consumer protection laws. We also provided a list of toys that have been recalled over the past year.

“Our leaders and consumer watchdogs need to do more to protect our youngest consumers from the hazards of unsafe toys. No child should ever be injured, get sick or die from playing with a dangerous toy,” said Dev Gowda, toxics advocate with U.S. PIRG Education Fund.

Visit toysafetytips.org to read our full Trouble In Toyland report.

Thanks To You

Dear MASSPIRG member,

We’ve always stood up for everyday Americans when their health or well-being is at risk, and the last few months were no different.

After Equifax was hacked, MASSPIRG Education Fund immediately got information into consumers’ hands on how to protect themselves, and MASSPIRG led the call for free credit freezes for all. After MASSPIRG Education Fund research found high levels of lead in fidget spinners, Target agreed to stop selling them. After the devastating hurricanes, we called on officials to do more to clean up toxic spills and flooded Superfund sites.

But we’re not just responding to these threats; we’re building a better future that works for all Americans.

We want to live in a world where we don’t need to worry about being tricked or trapped by financial companies, where our food systems don’t depend on the widespread use of pesticides in fields or the routine use of antibiotics on farms, and where Americans across the political spectrum can find common ground to make progress for all.

We’re so grateful for all that you’ve done to support our work, and we’re excited to see what we can do next.

Sincerely,

Janet Domenitz, Executive Director
info@masspirg.org
Toxics

Working To Ban Bee-Killing Pesticides

Bees are dying at unprecedented rates, with real consequences for our food supply, environment and economy. We rely on bees to pollinate $15 billion worth of crops every year—everything from almonds to strawberries to the alfalfa used to feed dairy cows.

That’s why MASSPIRG launched our Ban Bee-Killing Pesticides campaign last fall, going door to door and email inbox to inbox to educate and engage our supporters to take action to save bees and our food supply.

With support from our members, we’re calling for Massachusetts to ban bee-killing pesticides like neonicotinoids, and our national network is doing the same in other states. If enough states take action, we will eliminate the use of more than 40 percent of insecticides used in this country, giving bees a better chance to survive. Furthermore, that kind of collective action will be a strong signal to large chemical companies and to the federal government that the public wants to limit the use of bee-killing pesticides.