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**VIEWPOINT** THE CONSUMERS UNION PERSPECTIVE

Here, a monthly perspective from Consumers Union on the latest

## Your voice can help reduce identity theft

### What you can do

To learn more about CU's campaigns or to find one you'd like to join, go to [www.ConsumersUnion.org](http://www.ConsumersUnion.org).

If you think that one person can't make a difference, note the story of Jaimee Napp. When a former boss stole her personal information and opened fraudulent credit-card accounts, Napp tracked her down and then mounted a successful campaign to bring identity theft protection to Nebraska, her home state.

So that other identity theft victims would not go through the same frustrating experience that she did to clean up the mess left by the crime, Napp set up the Identity Theft Action Council of Nebraska. The nonprofit group educates consumers, works with policymakers on solutions, and collaborates with consumer advocates, including Consumers Union's Financial Privacy Now campaign, to win greater protection.

While Napp's perseverance is impressive, it's not unusual. Thousands of people have worked with Consumers Union to gain safety, health, and financial safeguards at state and federal levels, helping to build a consumer movement that's gaining in momentum and influence.

Starting a nonprofit group and lobbying legislators might not be in your game plan, but more manageable efforts can have an equally powerful effect on the issues that concern you.

### HALF A MILLION VOLUNTEERS

Some 500,000 of you support CU's advocacy campaigns in a variety of ways, including sending e-mail to lawmakers and sharing your own experiences with others facing the same problem. Dozens of consumers have told their stories to state lawmakers or testified before congressional committees.

Thirty-nine states and Washington, D.C., have passed security-freeze laws to prevent identity theft by allowing people to block access to their credit reports and scores. Volunteers are also working to get Social Security numbers removed from ID cards and to prevent them from appearing unnecessarily in mail that is sent to consumers. They're also trying to stop businesses from asking for those numbers when they don't need them.

In addition to financial-privacy concerns, Consumers Union, the nonprofit publisher of *Consumer Reports*, is focused on a range of issues where your voice can make a difference. Volunteers have contributed immeasurably to CU's campaigns to lower cable, telephone, and Internet bills, ensure safer food, and require hospitals to publicly disclose their infection rates so that patients can know about risks and make informed choices. Twenty states now require such disclosure from hospitals, and one other, Massachusetts, will most likely have a similar law passed by the end of the year.

And because of the contributions of consumer activists, Congress is close to completing major reforms to the country's prescription-drug safety system.

Napp says her early efforts got no attention. "But I kept talking and eventually started to be heard," she says. "I can see how far I have come and how one person can make a difference."

Each e-mail and phone call brings consumers closer to a fair and safe marketplace. Whether it's fighting for consumer-protection laws or marketplace reform, there are many ways to help.