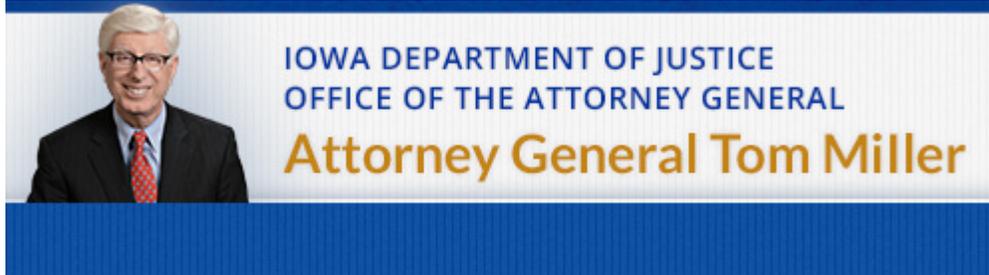


[Skip to main content](#)



[Main Content](#)

January 17, 2019

Consumer complaints rise 18 percent in 2018

AG's office proposes bills to address home improvement complaints and other problems

DES MOINES -- Consumer complaints to the Iowa Attorney General's Office increased 18 percent in 2018 over the previous year, led by complaints related to vehicles, home improvement projects and imposter scams.

In total, the office's Consumer Protection Division received 3,495 complaints, up from 2,961 in 2017. This follows a 5 percent increase from 2016 to 2017.

"It's hard to pinpoint an exact reason for the increase, but we're seeing more complaints in several categories," Attorney General Tom Miller said. "Our investigators and attorneys attempt to resolve each complaint as fairly and justly as possible. In some cases, we could use the Legislature's help in strengthening Iowa laws to provide justice to consumers."

Topping the list was auto complaints at 493, which included complaints over repairs, financing, warranties and sales practices for vehicles including cars, motorcycles, ATVs, and trailers.

The number of complaints over imposter scams more than doubled over the last year, from 161 to 339. The category was again the second-highest category of complaint but likely is only the tip of the iceberg. Many more consumers contacted the Consumer Protection Division to report the scams but did not file complaints.

Imposter scams, which generally occur through phone calls, emails, or [social media](#), involve a scammer who pretends to be someone they're not, poses an urgent problem and seeks immediate payment to resolve that problem. Imposters engage in a variety of ruses, such as pretending to be a company with whom you've done business, an IRS agent collecting overdue tax payments, or relatives who need money for an emergency.

“Don’t wire money or provide money card or gift card numbers to anyone over the phone who wants you to pay now,” said Miller, who urges Iowans to hang up when receiving such a call. Don’t respond to messages without verifying phone numbers or social media accounts, he said.

Home improvement complaints were again near the top of the list and increased 28 percent over last year.

Miller urges consumers to avoid red flags like unsolicited calls or high-pressure sales tactics, and to check references before you make a down payment and get a contract in writing. Find more tips on [the Attorney General’s website](#).

Too often, homeowners are left in the lurch if they make a down payment on a project and a contractor fails to finish the job. As a result, the Iowa Attorney General’s office has [pre-filed a bill with the Legislature](#) to strengthen the law involving home improvement contracts. Under the bill, a contractor must file with the state a \$75,000 surety bond, and consumers damaged by a fraud or breach of contract can recover costs from the bond. Contractors who violate the requirement would be guilty of a simple misdemeanor.

Attorney General Miller has also proposed bills that would:

- require [education loan debt management companies](#) to obtain a license from the Iowa Division of Banking and provide disclosures and other protections for borrowers.
- add motorcycles to [Iowa’s Lemon Law](#), which protects buyers of new or used vehicles. Another [proposal would increase the amount of the surety bond that travel trailer dealers](#) must carry in case of loss or damage suffered by buyers.
- [strengthen Iowa’s law governing notifications of data breaches](#) and expand the definition of personal information that can be affected by such security breaches.
- increase [penalties for elder abuse, including financial exploitation](#).

New laws can make a big difference. In 2017, the Consumer Protection Division received 127 written complaints related to payday lending. That shrank to nine in 2018, in part because the 2017 Legislature changed the [law to](#) crack down on unlicensed lenders, the majority of which are online payday lenders. The division still gets calls related to payday lending but most are resolved without filing a written complaint.

MOST COMMON CONSUMER PROTECTION DIVISION COMPLAINTS IN 2018

Here are the top 15 categories, with the most common subcategories under each:

Category	Total complaints	Top subcategories	Subcategory complaints
Auto	493		
		Auto repairs	158
		Financing	80
		Warranty plans & services	58
Imposter	339		
		Business	121
		Government	63
Home improvement	286		
		Miscellaneous remodeling services	144
		Roofing/windows/siding	76
Media	283		
		Satellite TV	76
		Bundled media services	74
Home Goods & Services	182		
		Appliances	42
Telecom	166		
		Mobile	119
Housing & Realty	166		
		Time share sales	67
		Rental housing	40
Internet	164		
		Tech support scams	80
		Access services	46
Lending (non-mortgage)	136		
		Credit cards	58
Personal services	131		

Health care	120		
		Provider/insurance billing	42
Debt	114		
		Collections	106
Business-to-business	101		
		Supplies & Service	67
Insurance	101		
		General	98
Mortgage	96		
		Loan servicing	27
		Loss mitigation	17

Consumers with questions or complaints can contact the Consumer Protection Division through the Attorney General's website, by email or by phone:

Website: www.iowaAttorneyGeneral.gov

Email: consumer@ag.iowa.gov

Phone: 515-281-5926 (outside the Des Moines area, call toll-free: 888-777-4590)

[« Back](#)