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**THE NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS CELEBRATES
40 YEARS OF ENSURING A FAIR AND VIBRANT MARKETPLACE**

***Nations First and Strongest Local Consumer Protection Agency Continues to
Blaze Trails with its Office of Financial Empowerment***

Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) Commissioner Jonathan Mintz today announced the 40th anniversary of the nation's first municipal consumer protection agency. Founded in 1969, DCA has ensured that New York City consumers and businesses benefit from a fair and vibrant marketplace by regulating 57 industries; licensing more than 71,000 small businesses; enforcing the City's Consumer Protection, Licensing, and Weights and Measures Laws, as well as New York State and federal regulations; and by mediating thousands of consumer complaints every year.

In 1968, the City's Department of Markets, which included the City's Weights and Measures division, merged with the Department of Licensing to form one unified Department of Consumer Affairs. But it was not until the passage of New York City's landmark Consumer Protection Law in 1969 that the Department gained its broad authority to protect the public from deceptive business practices. This law made DCA the first municipal agency of its kind in the country. The passage of Local Law 20 of 1973 expanded DCA's authority even further, requiring that businesses compensate wronged consumers.

Over the years, DCA continued to enhance consumer protections by licensing debt collection agencies, process servers, employment agencies, and used car dealers. In 1984, the Department established the Home Improvement Contractor Trust Fund to compensate victims of unscrupulous contractors. More recently, the Department rid the City of polluting sightseeing buses, licensed retail cigarette dealers to ensure that they did not sell to minors and made it easier than ever for all businesses to be licensed by making license applications available online.

"Even before the Department of Consumer Affairs was founded 40 years ago, New York City led the way in ensuring consumers were treated fairly in the marketplace. With the authority of New York's landmark Consumer Protection Laws, we have expanded these consumer protections for New Yorkers, making our Department the strongest local consumer protection agency in the nation," said DCA Commissioner Jonathan Mintz. "But the Department has also reinvented itself to meet new challenges, addressing issues from false advertisements that arose about miracle AIDS drugs in the '90s, to including protections for consumers in the financial services marketplace beginning in 2006."

Led by Mayor Bloomberg and his aggressive antipoverty agenda, DCA blazed an unprecedented consumer protection trail in 2006 when it launched its Office of Financial Empowerment (OFE), the first local government initiative in the nation aimed expressly at educating, empowering and protecting those with low incomes. DCA's OFE has emerged as a national leader in the field of municipal financial empowerment through programs like the \$aveNYC Account, the Your Money Helpline and the City's

Financial Empowerment Centers. These programs have served as replicable models for other cities across the U.S., particularly through the Cities for Financial Empowerment (CFE) Coalition, where member cities can spread the best practices in municipal financial empowerment. This Coalition, which DCA founded and co-chairs with the City of San Francisco, has enabled DCA to spawn a national financial empowerment movement.

In the past five years, DCA has issued nearly 60,000 violations, mediated 32,000 consumer complaints and returned more than \$31 million in restitution on behalf of New York City Consumers.

Some DCA milestones include:

- Largest settlement: reached in 2001, following an investigation into H&R Block's Rapid Refund promotional campaign. DCA issued more than 2,200 violations, leading to a settlement which exceeded \$4 million. A portion of this settlement was then used to fund the City's Earned Income Tax Credit public awareness campaign, which quickly became a national model.
- Largest restitution to consumers: issued in 2007, a sum of \$600,000 was refunded to 123 homeowners from DCA's Home Improvement Contractor Trust Fund. Although the contractor subsequently agreed to reimburse the Fund fully, this marked an historic settlement in DCA history.
- Largest fine: levied in 2008, when DCA forced Party City to pay a half a million dollars to the City as a result of a lawsuit charging the company for repeatedly displaying and selling illegal fake guns.

For more information about the Department of Consumer Affairs, to file a complaint, check a business license or request a publication, visit www.nyc.gov/consumers.

DCA enforces the Consumer Protection Law and other related business laws throughout New York City. Ensuring a fair and vibrant marketplace for consumers and businesses, DCA licenses more than 71,000 businesses in 57 different industries. Through targeted outreach, partnerships with community and trade organizations, and informational materials, DCA educates consumers and businesses alike about their rights and responsibilities. DCA's Office of Financial Empowerment is the first municipal office of its kind in the nation with a mission to educate, empower and protect New Yorkers with low incomes. DCA's OFE administers a citywide network of Financial Empowerment Centers and other products and services that help these New Yorkers make the best use of their financial resources to move forward economically. For more information, call 311 or visit DCA online at www.nyc.gov/consumers.