

Recent disclosures of possible abuses in the field of second mortgage financing have served to point up the need for some type of overall consumer protection in Maryland.

Maryland, of course, now does a great deal to protect the consumer. Through the Peoples' Counsel, for example, the consumer's interest is protected in public utility matters; the Department of Weights and Measures provides protection from short weights for the marketing housewife; the Securities Commission guards against the sale of spurious stocks to the public; the Home Improvement Commission has eliminated much fraudulent practice in this area; the Savings and Loan Industry is now closely regulated, and there is excellent work accomplished by private agencies such as the Better Business Bureau and other consumer organizations.

There still, however, is no governmental agency suitably empowered to investigate and deal with many instances in which the public, as consumers, are defrauded of their money or have undue advantage taken of them.

An Office of Consumer Protection would be helpful not only to the buying public, but also to reputable retailers, service institutions, and lending firms, by helping to keep out of our State that small element of business seeking gain by shady and illegal practices.

The functions of the Office of Consumer Protection would be:

(1) To educate the public as to nefarious schemes which may from time to time be foisted upon the public.

(2) To recommend to the Governor and the General Assembly legislation to protect the public from fraudulent promoters and the schemes which they propose.

(3) To study consumer problems generally from the standpoint of value received by the consumer and report periodically to the public.

(4) To make specific investigations concerning alleged fraudulent practices and offer assistance to the Office of the State's Attorneys or information to Grand Juries concerning such matters.

In order to function effectively, the office must be endowed with subpoena powers so that it can call witnesses and question them under oath. This would be essential to any effective operation.

Accordingly, the General Assembly is requesting that all these matters be studied during the year 1966, and that the Office of the Attorney General be requested to give such assistance and help as possible; now, therefore, be it

*Resolved by the General Assembly of Maryland, That the Legislative Council is requesting during the year 1966, to add to its agenda for study the proposal from the Attorney General of Maryland to establish in some form or other an Office of Consumer Protection in this State; and be it further*

*Resolved, That the Legislative Council is requested to submit the results of its study together with any recommendations it may deem pertinent to the General Assembly of 1967.*

Approved May 6, 1966.