

Complaint Bulletin

Complaints mentioning coronavirus keywords

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1. Introduction

Consumer complaints and company responses provide the Bureau with near real-time information about the types of challenges consumers are experiencing with financial products and services and how companies are responding to their customers' concerns.

The Bureau uses a variety of approaches to identify trends and possible consumer harm in complaints. Examples include:

- Reviewing cohorts of complaints and company responses to assess the accuracy, timeliness, and completeness of an individual company's responses to complaints sent to them for response
- Conducting text analytics to identify emerging trends and statistical anomalies in large volumes of complaints
- Visualizing data to highlight geographic and temporal patterns and using tools to filter, sort, and search complaints

These analyses support the Bureau's work to supervise companies, enforce federal consumer financial laws, propose rules, and develop tools that help empower consumers to make informed financial decisions and spot and assess emerging issues. The Bureau also shares consumer complaint information with prudential regulators, the Federal Trade Commission, other federal agencies, and state agencies using the secure Government Portal.

This Complaint Bulletin reflects complaint data as of May 11, 2020.¹ For this issue, complaints mentioning coronavirus reflects complaints that include one of the following words: COVID, coronavirus, pandemic, or CARES Act (see Section 2). This issue also highlights changes in overall complaint volume before and after the declaration of the national emergency (see Section 3).

A subset of these complaints is available in the [Consumer Complaint Database](#). The Consumer Complaint Database is a collection of complaints about consumer financial products and services that we sent to companies for response. Complaints are published after the company responds, confirming a commercial relationship with the consumer, or after 15 days, whichever comes first. Complaints referred to other regulators, such as complaints about depository institutions with less than \$10 billion in assets, are not published in the Consumer Complaint

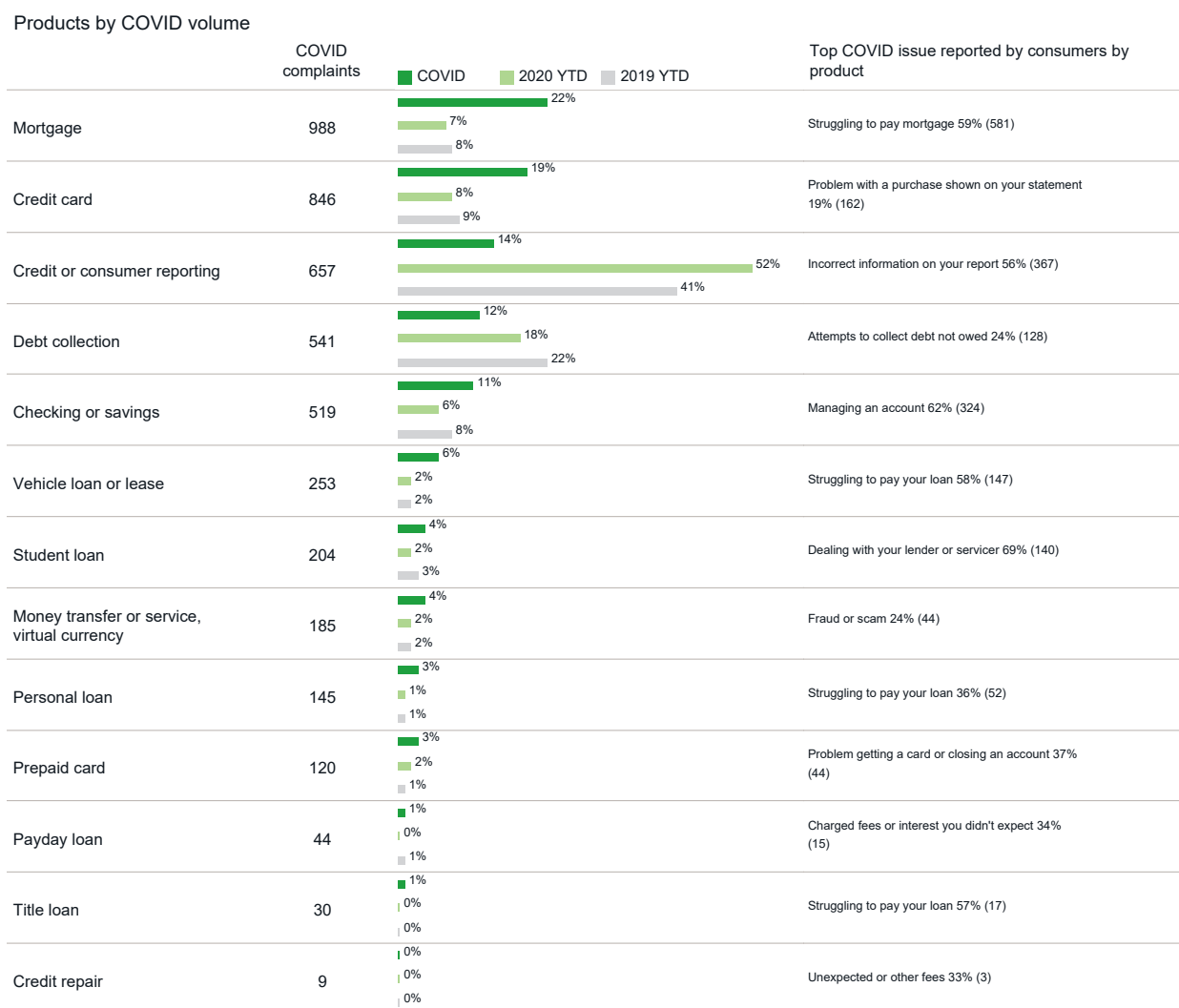
¹ This report is based on dynamic data and may differ from other public reports.

Database. Narratives from complaints are published if the consumer opts to share it publicly and after the Bureau takes steps to remove personal information.

To view complaints at a state-level, visit the Consumer Complaint Database. Users can filter and sort complaints. Users can also search published complaint narratives for key words of interest.

2. Complaints mentioning coronavirus keywords

FIGURE 1: COMPLAINTS MENTIONING CORONAVIRUS KEYWORDS, JAN. 1, 2020 TO APR. 30, 2020.



- In March and April 2020, the Bureau’s Office of Consumer Response received approximately 36,700 and 42,500 complaints, respectively – the highest monthly complaint volumes in the Bureau’s history. Consumers submitted more than 4,500 complaints that include coronavirus keywords.
- In 2019, the Bureau received an average of 29,000 complaints each month. The volume of complaints the Bureau receives each month is influenced by numerous factors, including Bureau outreach efforts, increased public awareness of educational resources and option to submit a complaint, and changing market conditions (e.g., increased frequency of free credit reports available to consumers).
- Servicemembers submitted approximately 600 complaints mentioning coronavirus keywords in March and April 2020: 8% of complaints submitted by servicemembers were COVID related compared to 5% of non-servicemembers. The term *Servicemembers* refers to self-identified servicemembers, veterans, and military families.
- Older consumers submitted approximately 300 complaints mentioning coronavirus keywords in March and April 2020: 9% of complaints submitted by older consumers were COVID related compared to 6% of non-older consumers. The term *Older consumers* refers to consumers who voluntarily reported their age as 62 years or older.
- While credit reporting and debt collection continue to be the most complained about products overall, mortgage and credit card complaints top the list for complaints that mention coronavirus keywords, with 22% and 19% of complaints, respectively.
- Among mortgage complaints that mention coronavirus keywords, 59% of consumers identified struggling to pay the mortgage as the issue.
- Among credit card complaints that mention coronavirus keywords, 19% of consumers identified problem with a purchase shown on their statement as the issue.

3. Complaint volume changes

The President declared a national emergency the week of March 8, 2020. Figure 2 plots weekly complaint volume eight weeks before and after the declaration for all complaints received.

FIGURE 2: PRODUCTS BY AVERAGE WEEKLY PERCENT CHANGE, JAN. 12, 2020 TO MAY 2, 2020.

Products by average weekly overall percent change in +/- 8 week period from week of national emergency declaration (March 8, 2020)



- Comparing the weekly average complaint volume before and after the emergency declaration, shows that prepaid card complaints saw the greatest percent increase and student loan complaints saw the greatest percent decrease. Many consumers received their unemployment benefits via prepaid cards—this contributed to the increase in

prepaid card complaints. Protections for student borrowers provided by the CARES Act may have contributed to the decline in student loan complaints.

- Before and after the emergency declaration, consumers submitted more complaints about credit or consumer reporting each week on average than any other product.

4. Complaint analysis highlights

The following observations are the result of a systematic review of complaints that mention the coronavirus keywords discussed in Section 1. These observations highlight common issues, but do not provide exhaustive coverage of all of the issues identified by consumers in their complaint narratives.

- Consumers described contacting their loan servicers and creditors to discuss alternative payment options. They are seeking changes to loan terms, including length of loans, interest rates, and alternative ways to postpone or lower monthly payments. Consumers are beginning to reference recently enacted laws that have not yet been reflected in their account (e.g., student loan forbearance).

Consumers typically described this issue in the following product categories: mortgage, credit card, vehicle loan/lease, student loan, and personal loan.

- Consumers described being unable to reach customer service representatives to talk with companies about their issue. Some consumers are reporting hold times of several hours. For those who are pursuing payment options, some described no methods other than phone to access potential options.

Consumers typically described this issue in the following product categories: mortgage, credit card, vehicle loan/lease, student loan, and personal loan.

- Consumers described concerns about credit reporting. Some consumers who are pursuing alternative payment options expressed concern about the potential negative credit reporting implications. Some consumers are concerned about negative reporting and, consequently, a reduced ability to obtain financing.

Consumers typically described this issue in the credit reporting product category.

- Consumers described continued attempts by companies to collect a debt. Consumers who receive collection attempts by companies expressed dismay that companies are continuing collection activities during a national emergency.

Consumers typically described this issue in the debt collection product category.

- Consumers raised concerns whether they will have to pay lump sum payments at the completion of forbearance periods. Many of these consumers reported that companies offering forbearance periods informed them that there would be a balloon payment equal to the entire amount placed in forbearance. Some consumers report that the 90-day

forbearance period offered is insufficient and they will not be in a position to submit a lump sum payment in 90 days.

Consumers typically described this issue in the mortgage product category.

- Consumers raised issues about accessing proceeds of unemployment benefits. Some consumers indicated they received their benefits on prepaid cards. Some consumers reported difficulty accessing their accounts, problems with withdrawing funds from their cards, and issues with prepaid cards that they no longer had in their possession but were loaded with unemployment benefit disbursements.

Consumers typically described this issue in the prepaid product category.

Consumer Response continues to analyze complaints and to assess the accuracy, completeness, and timeliness of companies' responses, and to ensure that the Bureau and other regulators have useful information about consumer complaints concerning financial products and services.

For information about complaints and how the complaint process works, visit [consumerfinance.gov](https://www.consumerfinance.gov) or read the Consumer Response Annual Report to Congress, available at <https://www.consumerfinance.gov/data-research/research-reports/2019-consumer-response-annual-report/>.

Consumers can find information and resources to protect and manage their finances during the coronavirus pandemic at <https://www.consumerfinance.gov/coronavirus/>.