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**Credit Report Security Freeze**

**What is a credit report security freeze?**   
A credit report security freeze generally allows a consumer to block access to his/her credit report by third parties (such as credit lenders) who are not exempted under law.

**Who is eligible for a credit report freeze?**   
All Virginians have a right to obtain a freeze from the individual credit reporting agencies.

**Why might I decide to place a freeze on my credit report?**   
Unlike many identity theft protection methods which are only effective after identity theft has occurred, credit report freezes can help protect consumers from identity theft before it happens.

Credit report freezes are designed to prevent thieves from opening new accounts in the consumer’s name.  Generally credit isn’t extended to an individual without first checking his/ her credit report.  Since a freeze blocks third parties from accessing your credit report, it makes it very difficult for a potential identity thief to fraudulently open a new account in your name.

**What are the downsides or limits of placing a freeze on my credit report?**   
Freezes may delay, or prohibit the timely approval of new loans, credit, mortgages, government services or payments, insurance, rental housing, employment, investments, licenses, cellular phone and utility service, digital signature, Internet credit card transactions, and extension of in-store credit.  Since there may be a delay between the receipt of your request and the actual lift or removal, it is important to plan ahead to ensure that your credit report is accessible for purchases and other significant transactions.

In addition, a freeze will not prevent a thief from fraudulently using your existing credit card or bank accounts.  Therefore, you should continue to regularly check your monthly account and credit card statements for signs of any suspicious activity.

**How do I place a freeze on my credit report?**   
Send a written request via certified mail or by using another method authorized by the credit reporting agency.  The “Security Freeze” law does not specify what information the credit reporting agencies may require to place a freeze on your credit reports.  Thus, each credit reporting agency has its own procedures in place.  Check the individual agency’s (Equifax, Experian, TransUnion) website for specific instructions on how to obtain a freeze.

**Do I have to contact each bureau (Equifax, Experian, TransUnion) or just one?**

You must contact each credit reporting agency with which you wish to place a freeze.

**How do I temporarily lift the freeze once it is placed on my credit report?**   
A temporary lift allows the credit reporting agency to release your credit report to a specified party (specific third party lift), or to all third parties for a specified period of time (global lift).

To obtain a temporary lift, you must contact the credit reporting agency with which you placed the freeze and provide proper identification and the unique personal identification number (PIN) or password assigned to you.   You also must indicate the amount of time that you would like the freeze to be lifted or the specific party that can access the report.  Credit reporting agencies generally are required to be able to lift a freeze within 15 minutes of their receipt of an electronic request.

**How do I permanently remove the freeze once it is placed on my credit report?**   
You must contact each reporting agency with which you placed the freeze.  You will need your PIN or password for the request.  It may take up to 3 days to remove the freeze.

**How much does it cost to place, lift, or remove a freeze on my credit report?**   
If you are a victim of identity theft, the freeze may be placed, lifted, or removed for free.

If you are not a victim of identity theft, credit reporting agencies are permitted by statute to charge you a fee to place the security freeze.  The “Security Freeze” law does not authorize credit reporting agencies to charge fees for temporary lifts or removals of security freezes.

**Can I still access my credit report even though there is a freeze?**   
You may still get your free annual credit report or purchase a copy of your report or score.  Placing the freeze does not affect your ability to obtain the report and it does not affect your credit score.  Obtaining the free annual report is one way to find out if you have become the victim of identity theft.  You can obtain your free annual report by going to: *www.annualcreditreport.com*.

**Can my credit report be provided to another party while I have a credit freeze?**   
Yes, there are certain exceptions provided under law.  These include:

* Companies with which you have an existing account (e.g., your mortgage, credit card, or cell phone company, or their collection agencies)
* Any person or entity using the report with your permission to extend credit
* State or local agencies, child support agencies, law enforcement agencies, trial courts, or private collection agencies acting under a court order, warrant, or subpoena
* The Commonwealth when investigating fraud, collecting delinquent taxes or unpaid court orders, or performing other statutory responsibilities
* Pre or post screening under the Fair Credit Reporting Act
* Any person or entity monitoring your credit file or providing you with a copy of your report with your permission or upon your request
* Any person or entity using the information to set or adjust a rate, adjust a claim, or underwrite for insurance purposes
* Any employer in connection with any application for employment

Information provided by the Office of the Attorney General

*http://www.ag.virginia.gov/Consumer%20Protection/Consumer\_CR\_Security\_Freeze.html*