

CONSUMERS LEAGUE OF NEW JERSEY

NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2008

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SEN. BUONO'S LEMON LAW BILL S-454 PASSES NJ SENATE, NOW IN ASSEMBLY CONSUMER AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

New Jersey Consumers League President Robert J. Russo, who formerly served for sixteen years as New Jersey's Lemon Law Director, testified in Trenton in favor of Lemon Law legislation, S-454, proposed by Senator Barbara Buono. This bill would increase the mileage limit from 18,000 to 24,000 miles, as well as add a safety provision to protect consumers who have potentially life-threatening defects in their vehicles. The bill, which died in the NJ State Assembly at the end of the last session, was released from the Senate Commerce Committee and then passed the full Senate in a 34-2 vote. The Bill is now in the Assembly Consumer Affairs Committee, where former CLNJ President, Neil Fogarty recently testified on behalf of the companion Lemon Law legislation, A-1954.

"We are currently ranked second in the nation in the effectiveness of our Lemon Law, behind California, which has a safety provision similar to the one proposed in Senator Buono's bill" said Russo. "I have seen first hand how consumers had to be turned away because they were just over the 18,000 mile limit, or had a serious defect which did not yet reoccur 3 times. Calls to my staff at Consumer Affairs Lemon Law indicated that many consumers were driving more miles for work or family purposes than when the law was originally passed in 1989, and that the 18,000 mile cap was now being reached sooner, much before the 2 year time limit. Some states, such as Florida, have a time limit, like our 24 months, but no mileage maximum", notes Russo, who also served as President of the International Association of Lemon Law Administrators.

"I urge the NJ Legislature to pass this stronger Lemon Law bill as soon as possible, in order to allow more consumers to be eligible to receive the services of our excellent Lemon Law program and to protect more families from defective "lemon" vehicles. This Bill will make NJ number one in the nation in Lemon Law protection."

Join the CLNJ. Annual dues are only \$20. Send your check or bring to our annual meeting on Wed. Sept. 10 6PM in Montclair.

CONSUMERS LEAGUE SUCCEEDS IN "RENT TO OWN" SETTLEMENT

\$109 Million to be Refunded to consumers

After the N.J. Supreme Court ruled that "rent to own" contracts at Rent-a-Center, which exceeded N.J.'s 30% criminal usury law would be illegal, the RAC company tried to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. That effort failed. RAC then settled the case. A Superior Court Judge approved the class action settlement on September 14, 2007. Consumers who had a rent-to-own contract with Rent-a-Center in New Jersey, during the period April 23, 1999 to March 16, 2006 are entitled to refunds. In general, checks will be mailed directly to the RAC customers at their last known addresses. However, customers who have moved, or who are not contacted by mail, should go to this website: "<http://www.racsettlement.com>" for more information about how to claim your refunds. That website has a form for submitting questions as well.

Congratulations to the lawyers who litigated for many years to bring about this success for N.J. consumers: Mark Cuker, Esq., Seth Lesser, Esq. and William Riback, Esq.

Congratulations to the consumer groups who stood firm for the last twenty years in the state legislature, urging government to protect consumers, not help fleece them: NJPIRG, CLNJ, Legal Services of New Jersey, the N.J. Public Advocate. On the national level: Consumer Federation of America, USPIRG, AARP, Consumers Union, and many others. (SEE RELATED STORY NEXT PAE ON NEW RTO BILL)



CLNJ President Bob Russo (far left) participates with students from Irvington H.S. in a recent N.J. Division of Consumer Affairs "Consumer Bowl". Irvington Mayor Wayne Smith (in suit) joins the students. He is a member of CLNJ. Russo recently attended the NCL conference in DC and assisted new NCL Pres. Sally Greenberg in a "Life Smarts" contest held in New Jersey.

**CONSUMERS LEAGUE OF NJ
TO HOLD ANNUAL MEETING
SEPTEMBER 10, 2008,
HONORING PAST PRESIDENTS
PATRICIA ROYER & NEIL FOGARTY**

Consumers League of New Jersey Annual Meeting will be held on Wednesday, September 10th at 6PM at the United Way of North Essex Second Floor Conference room, Social Services Building 60 S. Fullerton Avenue, Montclair, N.J. The annual meeting will include elections of officers and recognition of past Presidents Patricia Royer and Neil Fogarty.

There will be food and refreshments. Dues are \$20 and should be paid to attend. Additional contributions to Consumers League of New Jersey are welcome! Hope to see you on Sept. 10th at 6pm.

**New Rent to Own Bill Surfaces;
CLNJ Testifies Against**

A new RTO bill has been introduced in the State Assembly with former CLNJ President Neil Fogarty testifying against it in Trenton during June hearings. Prime sponsor Assemblywoman Grace Spencer of Newark says she wants to improve the bill and will meet with CLNJ and other opponents to discuss the amendments proposed by consumer groups, including CLNJ, Citizen Action, NJPIRG, AARP and Legal Services of NJ. All were opposed to exempting RTO stores from the 30% usury law. We will keep you posted on our efforts.

**CONSUMERS LEAGUE HEARS FROM
CHINA PRODUCT SAFETY ADVOCATE**

Consumers League Board heard a presentation by Charles Lee, a former prisoner in Chinese jails, who was used during his incarceration to help manufacture toys and other products which he says contained potentially dangerous materials, assembled in unhealthy conditions. Lee asked the Consumers League to help fight the unfair labor practices of China's ruling government and alert US consumers to the dangers of products coming from China and other foreign countries, where no inspections, standards or controls protect consumers.

Susan Prager of Montclair, a new League member, arranged the presentation and also asked the League to get more involved in the issue of dangerous products and unfair labor practices abroad. The CLNJ has urged the passage of legislation proposed by NJ Congressman Frank Pallone to strengthen and adequately fund the US Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Join the Consumers League of New Jersey and help us fight for the issues highlighted in this newsletter and for the consumer protection you deserve!

Annual dues are only \$20.00.
Please send your check made payable to CLNJ to:

Consumers League of NJ
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Montclair, NJ 07042