



Department of Business Regulation

Insurance Division

1511 Pontiac Avenue, Bldg. 69-2

Cranston, RI 02920

Consumer Alert

Be Skeptical About "Free Meal" Financial Seminars

Before you accept any invitation about financial, retirement or estate planning, the Rhode Island Insurance Division wants you to know that many insurance and financial firms reach out to middle-aged and older adults or host free meal seminars.

The offer of free meals, door prizes, and/or free advice may lead you to attend a seminar when you wouldn't otherwise. Some invitations make you feel it's urgent to register due to "limited space." A nice restaurant, an expensive meal, and a well-dressed presenter may be impressive, but it doesn't mean that what they're selling is right for you.

There is always a purpose to a "free" seminar, even those advertised as unbiased and educational. You should know that if you put personal information on a registration form, that information likely will be used to market products or services to you.

- **Do your homework before you attend a seminar or meet with an insurance or financial expert.** Contact the Rhode Island Insurance Division to verify that the person is licensed to sell the product. Ask if there have been complaints or enforcement actions against this person.
- **Review credentials closely.** Individuals selling insurance and financial products may advertise their credentials to gain the trust of clients. Some credentials suggest a certain expertise to provide insurance and financial advice that may or may not exist. Before you attend a free seminar or meet with an insurance or financial expert, find out how they earned their credentials.
- **Does this product or service make sense for you?** Always be sure you understand what's being sold. Insurance and financial products can be complicated even for the most informed consumer. Don't hesitate to ask questions, especially if you don't understand something. You should be able to explain a product in your own words to someone (other than the salesperson) in a way that makes sense to both of you. It's rare that one product or service will meet the financial needs and goals of everyone attending a seminar.

- **Be cautious about any promises that one product can meet all of your financial needs.** The product must be right for you, your lifestyle, your financial goals, and your tolerance for risk. If you attend a seminar, you may be exposed to high pressure tactics, frightening stories about people who don't have enough money to live on in retirement, and promises of unrealistic financial returns. Decide before you go that you won't give our any personal information, sign any documents, or make any decisions while you're there. Leave your checkbook at home and consider getting a second opinion before you sign anything.
- **Report suspected scams to the Rhode Island Insurance Division.** Anyone can find themselves the victim of a financial scam so don't let fear, embarrassment, or uncertainty keep you from reporting. Your report will help prevent others from becoming victims, too. The Rhode Island Insurance Division is here to help as a consumer protection agency and may be able to help if you believe an insurance agent or company has misled you or sold you a product that isn't right for you.
- **To file a complaint,** please visit our website at www.dbr.ri.gov or send a written complaint and any supporting documents to:

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Phone: (401) 462-9520
Fax: (401) 462-9602
Website: www.dbr.ri.gov