

ALABAMA SECURITIES COMMISSION

Post Office Box 304700 Montgomery, Alabama 36130-4700
Telephone: (334) 242-2984 or 1-800-222-1253 Fax: (334) 242-0240
Email: asc@asc.alabama.gov Website: www.asc.alabama.gov

Start Your New Year with Financial Security

Montgomery, Alabama (January 8, 2026) - The New Year is a great time to refocus on financial goals, especially after the heavy spending that often comes with the holidays. Many people slide into debt during the holidays, but proper planning and consistent budgeting throughout the year can make a significant difference. Consumers not only spend a lot of money shopping online, but the convenience and enticing prices can lure them to fraudulent online shopping traps. Fraudsters are using artificial intelligence to deceive online shoppers by creating fake websites and sending out fraudulent emails and text messages. By the end of the holidays, consumers may've suffered even deeper losses due to fraud and identity theft. This year, strive to make financial health a top priority and work to develop a plan for a more secure financial future. To jumpstart a financial plan, consider the following advice to help protect, check, and plan for the upcoming year.

- 1. Protect personal and financial information.** Falling victim to a financial scam is one of the quickest ways to derail your financial journey. Never give out personal or financial information over the phone, email, text, or social media without verifying the legitimacy of the source, especially one you don't recognize.
- 2. Check credit reports.** Look for any unauthorized or suspicious inquiries, accounts, errors, or new information that may have appeared in your report throughout the year. You can visit www.annualcreditreport.com to download a free credit report from all three credit bureaus.
- 3. Check banking and investment accounts.** Check for unauthorized or unfamiliar charges, no matter how small. Scammers might attempt to complete a very small charge to see if they can successfully get into your account before trying a larger amount. If your accounts or identity have been compromised, report it to the local authorities immediately. The website www.identitytheft.gov provides a step-by-step process to follow for victims of identity theft.
- 4. Plan and set your financial goals.** Write down your financial goals. Include the total amount needed to save (or pay) and determine how much you'd need to set aside each paycheck to achieve that goal in the desired timeframe. Establishing an emergency fund should be your first financial goal. According to CNBC, nearly half of Americans have \$500 or less in their savings accounts, leaving them vulnerable to unexpected expenses. Having a solid emergency fund can help you avoid going into debt when unforeseen circumstances arise. A budgeting worksheet can be helpful. Click [here](#) to download a basic budget worksheet.
- 5. Start planning for retirement.** It's never too early to prepare for your future. Time is the key component in creating a solid nest egg for retirement. Start investing by paying into your employer-sponsored retirement plan or funding an individual retirement account. Many online brokerage firms offer accounts with no minimum balance to open and zero to minimal fees. If you work with a financial professional or firm, ensure that they are registered with the ASC.

The ASC urges Alabamians to make wise financial decisions and exercise caution with new financial opportunities. If you are suspicious of possible financial fraud or would like to request fraud prevention or

financial education training for your group, call the ASC at 1-800-222-1253. Free investor education and fraud prevention materials are available at www.asc.alabama.gov.

###

For further information, contact 1-800-222-1253 and ask for Public Affairs.