

FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION AND CREDIT REPAIR: FIVE THINGS SURVIVORS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING SHOULD KNOW

Many human trafficking survivors experience financial exploitation, which can lead to instability and even deter victims from seeking help. A trafficker may require or coerce victims to open, close, or mismanage bank accounts and credit cards, or engage in other activity that leads to bad credit. They may also fraudulently use victims' identification to access credit and commit financial crimes for many years after the survivor has exited the trafficking experience. Additionally, mounting debts from medical bills, bail bonds, bank account closures, unfinished schooling, car loans, and credit cards can have a debilitating effect on survivors seeking to secure financial services, housing, education, or other opportunities after exploitation.

In partnership with Moore & Van Allen PLLC, a leading law firm offering comprehensive legal services to human trafficking survivors, and Utah's Safe Harbor Crisis Center, Lexington Law is delivering pro bono credit repair, protection, and monitoring services to survivors. Credit repair organizations are one of the few third-party experts survivors can utilize to advance their consumer rights and ensure that their credit report is fair, accurate, and backed by evidence.

IF YOU'RE LOOKING TO REPAIR YOUR FINANCES AFTER EXPLOITATION, HERE ARE FIVE THINGS TO KNOW.

- 1 Know your rights.** A number of different federal and state laws extend special rights and protections to trafficking victims. For example, the 2021 [Debt Bondage Repair Act](#) gives survivors the right to have debts and other adverse information removed from their credit reports.
- 2 Verify your victim status.** In order to invoke the various protections available under federal law, survivors are required to obtain and provide various documents verifying their identity and victim status, including documents from court proceedings, law enforcement, an attorney, or a survivor support organization.
- 3 Review your credit reports for adverse items and errors.** The Debt Bondage Repair Act, passed at the end of 2021, streamlines the process victims must navigate to block adverse items on their credit reports. According to new rules implementing the law, [each credit reporting agency must now remove adverse items on a trafficking victim's credit report within twenty five business days](#) of receiving a request from a victim or their authorized representative. Credit reporting agencies are required to post information about the submission process on their websites. The type of information that a survivor might want to have removed from their credit report could include: prior evictions; non-payment of rent; loan defaults; unpaid bills that went to a collection agency; bankruptcy filings; and/or, criminal convictions that were the result of their trafficking experience.
- 4 Build good credit.** Building good credit history through financial products like credit cards and bank loans is equally important as removing adverse information on your credit report, but a lack of access to these products based on poor credit history remains a barrier. As part of the [Survivor Inclusion Initiative](#), organizations and participating banks help connect survivors to safe banking and help clients build good credit after bad in their pursuit of financial security and independence.
- 5 Seek legal or financial help if needed.** There is not a one-size-fits-all approach for survivors with unique histories and needs. In addition to legal relief that facilitates credit repair, credit repair organizations can work with survivors to help dismiss adverse credit information, establish healthy financial habits, and build good credit. Individual support from these third-parties empower survivors to find out what their needs are and tailor the financial repair process accordingly.

Endnotes:

<https://delta87.org/2022/01/can-new-us-law-help-increase-financial-recovery-reintegration-survivors-human-trafficking/>
http://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:8957/UNUFASTInsightCreditRepair.pdf?mc_cid=c1a6d7325e8mc_eid=f6b53e3bfd