

Trade-In a Vehicle... How hard can it be?

Human Services Spotlight Series #17

Sometime during July of 2020, the Complainant visited the Subject's auto dealership to service their current vehicle. The Subject offered to accept their vehicle as a trade-in plus an additional \$1,500.00 as full payment for a brand-new vehicle. The Complainant agreed, and the sale was completed.

A few days later the Complainant were contacted by the Subject and asked to return to the dealership. According to the Subject, they had forgotten to sign some necessary forms to complete the transaction. When the Complainant arrived at the dealership, they were informed the Subject had made a mistake on the vehicle's price; the Complainant owed \$20,000.00 more.

The Complainant was offered three different options to finalize the purchase. The first option was to keep the new vehicle and pay the extra \$20,000.00. The second option was to keep the vehicle on a 3-year lease basis. The Subject stated the lease would be "free" but, the Complainant disputed the claim since the Subject would retain their trade-in vehicle. The final option was to void the sale and take back their previous vehicle. The Complainant refused to pay the additional charges and sought legal advice.

The Complainant filed a complaint with this Department after speaking with an attorney. The Complainant researched the vehicle and found the same model and trim listed for \$8,000.00 more at a different dealership. She also discovered the vehicle

had a previous owner and was not a new vehicle. The Consumer Protection Investigator made several calls to the Subject. The CP Investigator spoke with both the Sales Manager and the General Manager on several occasions.

Due in part to the CP Investigator's efforts, the Subject agreed, in writing, to accept the Complainant's trade-in and the \$1,500.00 payment as full payment. The Subject also agreed not to pursue the matter any further.

Protect Regulate Investigate Educate

Sometimes it is hard to spot fraud when it is happening. Scams can be large or small, sophisticated or simple, but the people behind them have two things in common: They want to steal your money and avoid being caught. The reality is anyone could fall victim to a scam, no matter your age, intellect or economic status. Most consumer transactions are completed satisfactorily. On occasion, however, any consumer could experience unresolved problems such as defective products, erroneous bills or non-delivery of goods or services.

When you are confronted with such a situation, the dedicated employees of Pinellas County Consumer Protection are here to assist you. Investigators are available to speak with you regarding a consumer transaction at (727) 464-6200.

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