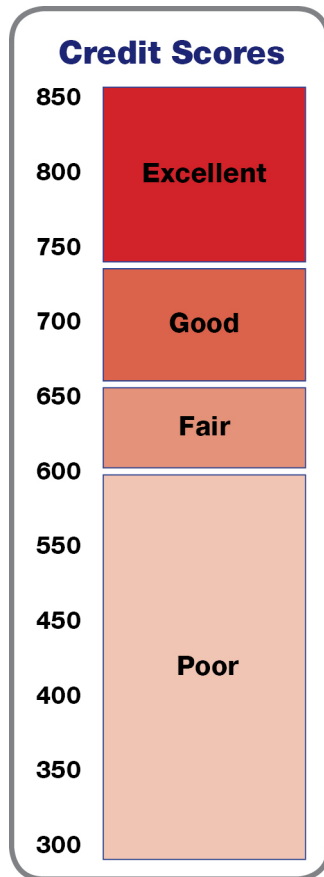


## Bankruptcy and your credit.

Ensuring that your credit report is accurate and maintaining a credit score that works for your life goals is important. Fortunately, there are ways to maintain or rebuild good credit.



### Credit Bureau contact:

#### Experian

P.O. Box 9556  
Allen, TX 75013-9556  
www.experian.com

#### Equifax

P.O. Box 740241  
Atlanta, GA 30374-0241  
www.equifax.com

#### TransUnion

Consumer Relations  
P.O. Box 2000  
Chester, PA 19022-2000  
www.TransUnion.com

Under federal law you can get a free copy of your three credit reports once a year at [www.AnnualCreditReport.com](http://www.AnnualCreditReport.com) or call 1-877-322-8228. The reports will not include your credit score. Getting your credit reports this way will not affect your credit score.

You can get your credit score free at [www.CreditKarma.com](http://www.CreditKarma.com) and access it as many times as need to monitor progress.

### What's on my credit report?

- Current and past payment information – whether your payments have been on time or late
- Outstanding balances – credit card balances and amounts of your outstanding loans
- Information about you from public records – such as bankruptcy or overdue property taxes
- Overdue child support payments
- The names of everyone who recently asked for a copy of your credit report
- Credit scores are based on your financial behavior and history, and do not include factors such as gender, race, religion, national origin, age, education level or marital status.

### What is a credit report?

It's a record of your loans, credit cards, payment history and outstanding debts. The information on your credit report is supplied by companies that have given you credit or loaned you money.

- There may be mistakes and you have the right to correct them.
- When you apply for a credit card or loan, lenders look at your credit report it to decide if you can handle additional debt.

### How do I get my credit report?

Three major credit reporting agencies collect and report information:

### What if there are errors on my credit report?

- You can dispute entries on your credit report if you believe they are in error. Each credit bureau has a dispute form, process and time limit for answering your claim. Contact each credit bureau directly for details.
- **Beware of companies claiming that, for a fee or monthly subscription, they can increase your credit score, repair your credit or remove negative items from your credit report.**
- No one can remove negative items unless they can be successfully disputed. You can use the same forms and processes that credit repair companies use – at no cost. They're available free from the credit bureaus.
- Only you can “repair” your credit by taking control. Begin by following the nine steps outlined below.

### What is my credit score?

Assigned by a credit bureau, it's a number between 300 and 850 that helps lenders determine how credit-worthy you are.

### What determines my credit score?

**Using Credit.** Using credit moderately makes you a better risk than not using credit at all.

**Payment History.** Do you pay your bills on time? Any missed payments recently?

**What You Owe.** The amount you owe as well as the ratio of debt to income.

**Types of Credit.** What credit cards you use and loans you carry.

**Length of Credit History.** How long you have had credit.

**New Accounts.** Opening several new accounts over a short time will negatively impact your credit score.

### Rebuilding your credit.

Rebuilding credit takes time and patience and you may need to get serious about a realistic budget and spending plan. Here are nine things you can do.

1. Review your Credit Report. Get a free copy once a year from [www.AnnualCreditReport.com](http://www.AnnualCreditReport.com) or call 1-877-322-8228.
  - Review it carefully to ensure that the information is correct. Any account included in a bankruptcy should show a zero balance. Bankruptcy can stay on your credit report for up to 10 years, but it should not take that long to rebuild your credit score.
2. Always pay your bills on time. Late payments or collections after bankruptcy will seriously hurt your credit score.
3. Get a secured credit card from your bank or credit union by depositing money which becomes collateral for the credit card.
  - Make sure the bank reports the card to the three major credit bureaus. Be careful because most bankruptcy filers get many credit card offers after discharge.
4. Add a car loan or line of credit down the road that you can pay off easily. Make every payment on time. That may help raise your credit score.
5. Know your credit card limits and keep your balances low. Use them sparingly.
6. Don't close accounts – keep credit lines open. Closing accounts reduces the amount of credit available to you.
7. Pay aggressively. Make more than the minimum payment on your credit cards each month.
8. Don't open a lot of new accounts over a short period of time.
9. Pay off credit card debt rather than transferring it to another credit card account.



**Richmond 804.355.2057**  
Interstate Center, 2104 W Laburnum Ave Suite 201, Richmond, VA 23227

**Virginia Beach 757.313.3000**  
Convergence Center III, 272 Bendix Road, Suite 330, Virginia Beach, VA 23452

**Hampton 757.825.5577**  
2 Eaton Street, Suite 106, (Corner of Settlers Landing), Hampton, VA 23669



### Patrick T. Keith

Patrick Keith is a President and Shareholder of the Richmond office. He has been practicing bankruptcy law since he joined Boleman in 2002. He is a frequent speaker on issues regarding foreclosure and bankruptcy to the Richmond Bar Association, community colleges and civic organizations. He also frequently speaks to law students at the University of Richmond School of Law regarding bankruptcy and the practice of law.