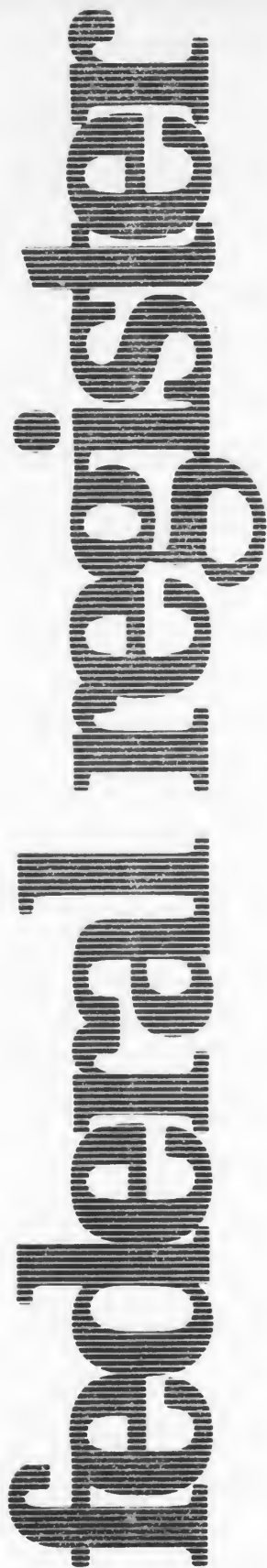

Monday
December 10, 1979

Part IV—Section C

**General Services
Administration**

Draft Consumer Program



GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION**Consumer Program—Implementation of Executive Order 12160****AGENCY:** General Services Administration.**ACTION:** Proposed Consumer Program.**SUMMARY:** The General Services Administration (GSA) is proposing an expansion of our current consumer activities. The proposed consumer program follows the guidelines in Executive Order 12160 (44 FR 55787, Sept. 26, 1979).**DATE:** Written comments must be received by March 10, 1980.**ADDRESS:** General Services Administration (XC), Washington, D.C. 20405.**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** David F. Peterson, Office of Consumer Affairs (202-566-1794).**AUTHORITY:** In accordance with Executive Order 12160. The General Services Administration issues the following proposed consumer program:**Background**

The General Services Administration (GSA) establishes policy and provides for the Government an economical and efficient system for the management of its property and records, including construction and operation of buildings; procurement and distribution of supplies; utilization and disposal of property; transportation, traffic, and communications management; stockpiling of strategic materials; and the management of the Government-wide automatic data processing resources program.

GSA's "public" is primarily other Federal agencies. However, there are three programs within GSA that are especially consumer-oriented: The Consumer Information Center (CIC), the Federal Information Center (FIC), and the Office of the Federal Register (OFR). GSA's consumer plan focuses on the activities of these three programs.

I. CONSUMER AFFAIRS PERSPECTIVE

The professional staffs of the Consumer Information Center and the Federal Information Center programs will constitute the Consumer Affairs staff of the General Services Administration. Those staff members comprising of Office of Federal Register consumer function will work closely with the Consumer Affairs staff of GSA.

Staff Location

The Consumer Information Center and Federal Information Center will report directly to the Director of Consumer Affairs for the General Services Administration. The Director of Consumer Affairs will monitor and coordinate the consumer activities performed by the Office of the Federal Register and other GSA operating components when appropriate. The Director of Consumer Affairs will regularly report to the GSA Administrator on implementation of this consumer plan.

Size and Resources

The Consumer Information Center was established by Executive Order 11566 in 1970, and its staff consists of 19 persons including consumer information and consumer media specialists. The Center has two basic responsibilities: To encourage Federal departments and agencies to develop and release relevant and useful consumer information, and to increase public awareness of and access to Federal consumer information. The Center maintains an active liaison program with more than two dozen Federal departments and agencies to accomplish these missions. Dissemination of consumer information is carried out by publication of the quarterly Consumer Information Catalog, in coordination with the media, to publicize the availability of consumer information; and distribution of Federal consumer publications through the Center's distribution facility in Pueblo, Colorado.

The Federal Information Center program was established to assist persons seeking information about the Federal Government and its programs. The program was established solely for the benefit of the consumers and users of Government services who have questions about the Government but do not know where to access the system to find the answers. An FIC headquarters staff of 7 persons and a field staff of 148 persons, located in 38 key cities across the country, provide in-person and toll-free telephone information services to approximately 50 percent of the U.S. population.

The Office of the Federal Register (OFR) is comprised of 90 persons and is responsible for the publishing of the daily *Federal Register*, which contains all Presidential proclamations, Executive orders, and Federal Government rules and regulations (final and proposed), and of the Code of Federal Regulations, which is the codification of the current general and permanent regulations of Federal agencies and is republished annually. Presidential speeches and other materials made public by the White House are published in the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* and annually in the *Public Papers of the Presidents*. The OFR provides additional information on Federal agencies in the annual *United States Government Manual*.

Responsibilities

The CIC, FIC, and OFR staffs will continue their regular operating procedures to accomplish the responsibilities listed above. These staffs will work closely together to coordinate consumer activities within GSA.

Participation in Development and Review of Agency Rules, Policies, Programs, and Legislation

The GSA Administrator will issue an agencywide order directing all operating components to notify the Director of Consumer Affairs of pending actions; e.g., rules, policies, and programs, that have potential significant impact on the economic well-being or quality of life of consumers. This order would be

effective within 30 days of publication of the final GSA consumer plan. Upon review of the proposed action, if the Director of Consumer Affairs determines that an agency action does significantly affect consumers, the Director of Consumer Affairs will meet with key officials, will submit written comments on proposals in order to present the consumer viewpoint, and will be included in the formal GSA clearance procedures before a final agency determination is made.

II. CONSUMER PARTICIPATION

When the Director of Consumer Affairs (DCA) determines that a proposed GSA program or policy significantly affects consumers, the DCA will ensure that the originating unit within GSA observes specific procedures for early and meaningful participation by consumers in the development and review of these proposals. These procedures will include the establishment of a plan for public comment that states how interested persons will be given the opportunity to comment on the proposed action or to participate in the rulemaking process. Among the options to be considered by the originating GSA unit for inviting consumer comments are: (1) Publishing an advance notice of proposed rulemaking in the *Federal Register*; (2) holding open conferences or public meetings; (3) sending notices of proposed actions to publications that are likely to be read by persons who will be affected; or (4) notifying interested persons directly. The DCA will assist the originating GSA unit in evaluating the comments received and in establishing an evaluation plan for the final action, focusing on its effect on consumers. The DCA will also establish a procedure for holding forums at which consumers can meet with GSA decisionmakers on topics of concern.

Avenues of Participation

The Consumer Information Center will continue to regularly conduct national consumer surveys to identify consumers' informational needs. These surveys involve interviewing 2,500 consumers with diverse demographic characteristics in order to pinpoint their need for specific publications. Survey results are reported by the age, sex, geographical location, income, and education of the respondents. The Center then encourages the development of Federal consumer information based on these consumer surveys and also learns what methods of information dissemination to use.

The Center also conducts audience surveys to obtain consumer views concerning ways to improve the CIC program. Once each quarter, questionnaires are enclosed with 1,500 randomly selected outgoing orders. They are designed to elicit advice and suggestions for new publications and also ask about the Center's service; e.g., whether the consumer was satisfied with the publications, how long it took to receive the order, and what the Center can do to improve the service.

The Center will establish publications evaluation surveys on a regularly scheduled basis to improve the quality of Federal consumer pamphlets. These surveys invite consumer suggestions for making revisions of

consumer publications more useful. The Center will undertake a more extensive analysis of consumer mail and telephone inquiries and will expand external liaison efforts with national, State, and local consumer organizations to obtain meaningful consumer participation in program direction and development.

The Federal Information Centers will encourage and assist consumers who are interested in participating in Federal agency rulemaking. The staff members will use the specialized training detailed in Section IV, Education and Training, to more fully assist the public in participating in the rulemaking processes. The FIC's will develop and keep current a list specifying the person within each department and agency responsible for public participation programs. Additionally, each FIC will obtain and post notices of public hearings. The Centers will have available for the public a 60-day file of *Federal Registers* if there is no library in the building with a more extensive file.

The Office of the Federal Register will continue and expand its consumer education workshops designed to assist consumers in using the *Federal Register*/Code of Federal Regulations system more effectively. A new segment will be added to specifically focus on the public's right to participate in the rulemaking process and to present guidelines for effective participation. The workshop information will be compiled into a self-teaching text. This text would be publicized by the U.S. Government Printing Office, the CIC, and the FIC and would be available for purchase through the Superintendent of Documents by consumers unable to attend the workshop.

III. INFORMATION MATERIALS

Agency Information Services

1. *Usefulness of Current Material*

The Consumer Information Center conducts programs to develop and disseminate consumer information. The Center encourages, coordinates, and assists Federal agencies in the development and distribution of consumer information publications through the Consumer Information Catalog and use of the Center's distribution facility in Pueblo, Colorado. The Catalog, published quarterly, lists more than 200 of the best Federal Government consumer booklets and covers a broad range of consumer topics. In FY 1979, the Center distributed more than 22 million consumer publications. The Center's media program includes the development of biweekly consumer news releases and monthly radio and television scripts that highlight publications in the Catalog and other topics of current consumer interest. The media staff also provides a media "hotline" service for consumer reporters seeking Federal consumer information assistance. Additionally, the Center conducts an annual public service campaign to increase awareness of the Catalog and Federal consumer publications. The campaign involves the development of television, radio, and print public service announcements. More than 450,000 Catalogs were distributed as a result of the FY 1979 public service campaign. Special efforts

are made to reach Spanish-speaking consumers through the *Lista de Publicaciones Federales en Espanol para el Consumidor*. This listing gives titles and ordering instructions for Federal consumer publications available in Spanish. The listing is distributed free to educators, libraries, community leaders, and consumer organizations. The Center also provides news releases and scripts to the Spanish media as well as prerecorded Spanish-language consumer features. In quarterly audience surveys the Center has consistently received an over-90-percent approval rate on questions concerning user satisfaction.

The Federal Information Center network is currently comprised of FIC's serving 85 major metropolitan areas. These centers provide in-person or toll-free telephone informational services to more than 50 percent of the U.S. population. The Centers currently distribute an information brochure describing the FIC services and listing the addresses and telephone numbers of the FIC's across the country, the Consumer Information Catalog, and a selection of other Federal Government consumer publications.

The Office of the Federal Register publishes the daily *Federal Register* and the Code of Federal Regulations, which is published annually. These publications inform consumers of the workings of their Government. The *Federal Register* is of particular importance to consumers because it is the only publication that covers all proposed Federal regulations and tells consumers how, when, and where to express their viewpoints.

2. Plans for Improvement

The Consumer Information Center will continue all of its consumer information programs listed above. The CIC media program will be expanded to include 26 additional consumer news releases annually and will increase its efforts to encourage major national magazines to promote consumer information through feature articles.

The CIC will encourage and assist the National Audiovisual Center, located in GSA, with the development and distribution of a listing of consumer education films. This pamphlet would be an interagency listing of educational films on consumer topics available through the National Audiovisual Center.

In FY 1980, the FIC program will begin an expansion effort as follows:

- Open the first statewide operation by expanding the two Florida FIC's to service the entire State.
- Expand FIC's in Missouri and Nebraska to statewide coverage.
- Open new FIC's in Kansas and Iowa that will provide immediate statewide service.
- Open a new FIC in Anchorage, Alaska.

The eventual goal of this expansion effort is to provide 100 percent of the U.S. population with toll-free telephone access to an FIC.

In FY 1980 the FIC program will begin an annual public service campaign to publicize the increased availability of FIC service. This campaign will use

television and radio public service announcements to inform consumers of the availability of FIC services.

New brochures detailing the FIC program and how to access it will be prepared and promoted widely within local communities. Additionally, the Centers will distribute other Federal consumer publications, especially the Consumer Resource Handbook from the Office of Consumer Affairs and the Consumer Information Center Catalog. The FIC's will also develop special resource lists to assist handicapped persons. These lists will identify Federal Government and local community programs that provide special services for persons with varying types of handicaps.

There will be a test program in the San Francisco FIC using a special telecommunications system that will allow deaf persons to use FIC services. This test, planned to begin in 1980, will be the first time deaf persons will have the opportunity to access an FIC.

The FIC headquarters staff will expand its liaison program with Federal agencies to offer assistance to those Federal agencies without an extensive field structure. In the past the Federal Communications Commission and the Office of Copyrights have used the FIC's to communicate vital information easily and quickly to consumers. The FIC's ability to dispense information and materials to consumers widely and with dispatch is a service that will be offered to Federal agencies.

With the cooperation of the issuing agencies, the Office of the Federal Register will establish a new research tool or "finding aid" for consumer-interest documents. This aid would appear in the daily *Federal Register* and would also be included in the monthly subject Index. It will state the matter being regulated in terms of the consumer issue impacted, the subject matter, and the name of the agency issuing the document; e.g., Nutrition; Food Labeling; Food & Drug Administration.

3. Officials Responsible for Consumer Information Program

The GSA Director of Consumer Affairs will be responsible for planning and carrying out the GSA consumer information program. The Director of Consumer Affairs will have direct responsibility for the CIC and FIC programs, and will monitor and coordinate the consumer information functions of the OFR.

Information on Agenda of Public Meetings

Each GSA service and staff office will be responsible for preparing explanatory materials regarding meetings open to the public for which they are responsible. Each office will also be responsible for developing appropriate plans for their distribution of the materials. The DCA will provide support and guidance as appropriate.

IV. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Areas in Which Training Provided

Executive Order 12160 requires that a consumer affairs staff be identified in Federal agencies, and that

this staff review proposed and final rules and regulations and policies issued by the agency in terms of their impact on consumers. Since the Office of the Federal Register has unique resources for conducting workshops and developing training materials to assist Federal consumer staffs in reviewing regulations, it will offer 1-day seminars in rulemaking and its relationship to the consumer affairs staff. These seminars will be offered on a continuous and regularly scheduled basis. Topics will include: What is "readability" in Federal regulations; basic administrative law; how to structure rulemaking to achieve maximum public participation; effective use of semiannual agendas as a consumer tool; and how to manage, digest, and analyze a large return of comments.

Responsibility for Educating Staff Members About Consumer Program

The GSA Director of Consumer Affairs will be responsible for educating the heads of all GSA operating components about Executive Order 12160 and the GSA consumer activities planned in this consumer program.

Method of Education

The GSA Director of Consumer Affairs will circulate Executive Order 12160, the proposed GSA consumer program, and other related materials to the heads of all GSA operating components. The GSA order mentioned in Section I, Consumer Affairs Perspective, will ensure the involvement of the Director of Consumer Affairs in all proposed agency actions that may significantly affect consumers.

Specialized Training for Consumer Affairs Personnel

The Office of the Federal Register will conduct its 1-day seminars in rulemaking and its relationship to the consumer affairs staff (described above) for the Consumer Information Center and Federal Information Center headquarters staffs. The supervisors of the 38 FIC's will also attend the OFR seminar during the annual FIC supervisors' conference.

The CIC and FIC staffs will continue to attend and participate in training courses and workshops on topics on consumer interest. Additional training for the consumer affairs staff will be offered for complaint handling, consumer participation procedures, and preparation of consumer informational materials as needed. The CIC and headquarters staff of the FIC program will arrange and regularly attend training sessions conducted by Federal and non-Federal resource persons who will provide detailed explanations of issues and programs on current consumer topics. Information from these briefings will be furnished to the 38 FIC's through FIC bulletins.

Technical Assistance

The consumer education workshops for consumers, described in Section II, Consumer Participation, will be conducted by the Office of the Federal Register. These workshops will focus on the public's right to

participate in the rulemaking process and will present guidelines for effective participation.

V. COMPLAINT HANDLING

The Consumer Information Center, the Federal information Center program, and the Office of the Federal Register will establish procedures for systematically logging in, routing, handling, responding, and analyzing consumer complaints and inquiries.

The CIC currently acts as a collection point for a wide variety of consumer complaints and inquiries. The Center forwards these to the appropriate Federal agencies and directs consumers to either local consumer agencies or private groups that can help with their particular problems. To better serve consumers, the Center is consolidating all the complaint handling in one clearly defined area and is designating a full-time professional staff member to serve as coordinator. The coordinator will:

—Maintain a log of the number of written and telephone complaints received, by specific topic; the logs will state what help was given to the consumer or to what agency he or she was referred;

—Send a followup letter to each consumer whose complaint is referred to another Federal agency. On a regular basis, the CIC will invite consumers to let us know if their problems have been resolved;

—Prepare, on a monthly basis, a summary of complaints and inquiries, both for internal use and to be sent to the U.S. Office of Consumer Affairs (USOCA); and

—Maintain liaison with consumer complaint units in other Federal agencies.

The CIC will also promote to the media and the public the availability of USOCA's Consumer Resource Handbook. This free publication tells consumers how to complain and get results, and gives a descriptive listing of Federal, State, and local governmental agencies and private organizations that can help.

Each year the FIC's receive between 7 million and 8 million inquiries, some of which are complaints about Federal programs or services and suggestions regarding how to make them more effective. The FIC program, both at the Center level and the Washington level, will analyze these complaints and suggestions and report quarterly to the appropriate agency the concerns voiced by the public. Where the situation requires immediate actions, the FIC's or the headquarters staff will promptly bring the matter to the appropriate agency official for resolution. Responses to inquiries or complaints received by the FIC's are immediate—either over the telephone or in person.

The OFR will maintain a reading file of complaint letters with the response letter attached, which will be available for public inspection upon request.

OVERSIGHT

The Administrator of General Services will designate the Director of Consumer Affairs (DCA), at

the GS-15 level, to be solely responsible for policy direction, coordination, and oversight of the agency's consumer activities. The Director of Consumer Affairs will regularly report to the Administrator on implementation of this consumer plan. The DCA will coordinate the consumer activities performed by the agency's consumer affairs staffs in the Consumer Information Center, the Federal Information Center programs, the Office of the Federal Register, and other agency components as appropriate. The Administrator will issue an agencywide order directing all GSA operating components to notify the Director of Consumer Affairs of pending actions; e.g., rules, policies, and programs, that have potential significant impact on the economic well-being or the quality of life of consumers. Upon review of the proposed action, if the Director of Consumer Affairs determines that an agency action does affect consumers nationally, the DCA will meet with key officials, will submit written comments on proposals in order to present the consumer viewpoint, and will be included in the formal GSA clearance procedures before a final agency determination is made.

Dated: November 26, 1979.

Ray Kline,

Acting Administrator of General Services.

BILLING CODE 6820-34 -M

Form Approved:
OMB No. 116579021**CONSUMER RESPONSE FORM FOR EXECUTIVE ORDER 12160**

Dear Consumer:

The _____ (agency) wants to make its consumer program better and more responsive to you, the consumer. We would like your thoughts and suggestions for improving our proposed consumer program. Please help us by answering the following questions:

1. Which of the following statements best describes your interest in our consumer program?
 - I am interested in it as an individual consumer.
 - I am concerned about it, because I represent a public interest consumer group.
 - I am concerned about it, because I represent a private company or organization.
2. After reading about our consumer program, do you think you understand how it works?
 - Yes, it is clear and I understand it.
 - Yes, I understand most of it.
 - No. Much of it is not clear to me.
3. Part of our consumer program sets up ways for consumers to help us make policies and rules. Do you feel our program makes it easier for you to participate?
 - Yes.
 - No. Why? _____
4. Our proposed consumer program outlines how we plan to get information out to consumers. How adequate do you think our plan is?
 - It seems adequate.
 - It is not adequate. Why? _____
5. We want to make it easy for consumers to bring their problems to our attention. Our proposed program tells how we intend to handle complaints from consumers. How good is our plan?
 - Adequate.
 - Not adequate. Why? _____
6. After reading our proposed consumer program, do you know whom or which office in _____ (agency) to contact if you have:
 - A complaint? Yes. No.
 - A general question about the agency? Yes. No.
 - A question about how to take part in agency proceedings? Yes. No.
7. Do you know who or which office in _____ (agency) speaks for the consumer? Yes. No. Any suggestions for improvement? _____
8. Do you have any suggestions for improving our consumer program?
 - No.
 - Yes, in the following areas:
 - Consumer participation _____
 - Informational materials _____
 - Complaint handling _____

9. Other comments or suggestions? (Use additional pages, if necessary.)

(Your name)

(Your address)

(City, state, zip)

**SEND THIS FORM DIRECTLY TO THE AGENCY PROPOSING THE PROGRAM ON
WHICH YOU ARE COMMENTING**