

<i>The Empire State</i>						
New York State			Governor Pataki	map-NY	e-bizNYS	Citizen Guide
CPB Home	Consumer Law Help Manual	Press Releases	Strategic Programs	Consumer Links	About the CPB	

[Go Back To Press Releases](#)

Contact: Jon Sorensen (518) 473-9472

For Immediate Release: September 17, 2003

Young people need protection from modeling scams

Victims cite Wilhelmina Scouting Network in growing number of high-pressure, no-results modeling scams

Investigation by the NYS Consumer Protection Board will include public forums, starting Oct. 9, to consider new consumer-protection laws

As a major modeling scam continues to trap young people and their parents, the New York State Consumer Protection Board announced today that it will conduct a series of public forums around the state as part of its investigation into these scams.

Teresa A. Santiago, Chairperson and Executive Director of the New York State Consumer Protection Board ("CPB"), said, "One of the biggest scams operating today is the Wilhelmina Scouting Network. It takes thousands of dollars from young people or their parents through high-pressure, misleading sales. All it gives in return are empty promises of a career in modeling."

At a news conference today at "Fashion Week" in Manhattan's Bryant Park, the CPB issued a warning to consumers to avoid the Wilhelmina Scouting Network ("WSN") and similar modeling scams. The CPB was joined at the news conference by several current and former clients of WSN.

Today's news conference also featured remarks by Joel Wilkenfeld, President of Next Model Management Company, one of the world's leading modeling agencies. Wilkenfeld said aspiring models do not have to spend a lot of money up-front in order to begin a modeling career.

Chairperson Santiago announced that the CPB will conduct investigative forums around the state to further warn the public about modeling scams and to examine possible legislative proposals to protect consumers from unscrupulous talent agencies. The first hearing will be in New York City on Oct. 9. In addition to invited speakers, victims of modeling scams and others may register to speak at the hearing by calling the CPB at 1-800-697-1220.

In its warning against the Wilhelmina Scouting Network ("WSN"), the CPB cited high cost of WSN's photography and website "service," its misleading sales representations, its high-pressure tactics and serious billing irregularities. For many young people, these costs can add up to nearly \$2,000 or more per person.

Despite those large expenses, the only job-hunting referrals sent to clients are emails notifying them of open auditions. Such auditions are already available to the general

public at no cost.

WSN also pushes additional costs -- such as an \$1,800 modeling competition in Orlando, Fla. -- onto its clients, some as young as six years old.

"From the moment they are approached by a WSN scout, young people and their parents are hit with hidden costs, surprise charges and phony offers to 'save' money by purchasing photography and other 'services,'" Chairperson Santiago said.

"They're capitalizing on people's hopes and dreams. It just turns my stomach to think how they can just take your money knowing they're not going to do anything for you." said Tiffany Shepard, a 29-year-old aspiring singer and actress from New Jersey who has spent close to \$2,000 with WSN.

These victims are among hundreds of young people and parents who have been scammed by WSN and its affiliated agencies, TransContinental Talent (aka TCTalent) and Options Talent, here in New York, Chairperson Santiago said.

Several WSN clients said they were attracted to WSN because of the Wilhelmina name, as well as the connection to Lou Pearlman and Trans Continental Talent. Pearlman is CEO of Trans Continental, who created several successful music groups such as the Backstreet Boys. Pearlman is a part-owner of WSN. Since last March, WSN has licensed the Wilhelmina name from the Wilhelmina modeling agency and is a separate corporation.

Chairperson Santiago said, "WSN is not the first company to rip-off people by charging upfront fees while hinting at future earnings in the modeling world. But WSN is certainly the largest with offices all over the country, including New York, Buffalo and New Jersey."

For an upfront fee of \$995 -- plus an additional monthly fee of \$19.95 -- WSN will post photographs of a prospective model on a website. The company charges hundreds of dollars more for photographers, clothes, makeup and other expenses.

Clients say they are later pressured into paying hundreds of dollars for more photographs and so-called modeling competitions. WSN is now pushing its customers -- some as young as six -- to attend a trip to Orlando for a so-called modeling competition called Fashion Rock. The per person charge is \$1,800.

[\[Home Page\]](#) [\[Consumer Law Help Manual\]](#) [\[Press Releases\]](#)

[\[Strategic Programs\]](#) [\[Consumer Links\]](#) [\[About the CPB\]](#)

New York State Consumer Protection Board

5 Empire State Plaza, Suite 2101, Albany, New York 12223-1556

[privacy statement](#) [\[E-Mail the CPB\]](#)