



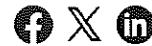
FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION
CONSUMER ADVICE

Consumer Alert

Equifax Data Breach Settlement: What You Should Know

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July 22, 2019



In September of 2017, Equifax announced a data breach that exposed the personal information of 147 million people. Under a settlement filed today, Equifax agreed to spend up to \$425 million to help people affected by the data breach. If you were affected by the Equifax breach, you can't file a claim just yet. That's coming. But you can sign up for FTC email alerts about the settlement at ftc.gov/Equifax.

(Not sure that you were affected? The breach claims site will have a tool to let you check. Sign up for an FTC email update to find out when that tool is up and running.)

The Equifax Breach – A Global Settlement



\$575,000,000+ settlement



Free credit monitoring
and identity theft services



Strong **data security** requirements

➔ **Learn more: ftc.gov/Equifax**

Source: Federal Trade Commission | [FTC.gov](https://ftc.gov)

Here's what you need to know about the settlement.

Benefits Available To You

If you were affected by the breach, you may be eligible for benefits.

1. Free Credit Monitoring or Cash Payment

You can get at least 4 years of free credit monitoring of your credit report at all three credit bureaus (Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion). On top of that, you can get up to 6 more years of free credit monitoring of your Equifax credit report. That's a total of 10 years of free credit monitoring. (Minors affected by the breach are eligible for even more free credit monitoring.)

If you have credit monitoring that will continue for at least 6 months and you decide not to enroll in the free credit monitoring offered in the settlement, you may be eligible for a cash payment. The amount you'd get will depend on the number of claims filed.

2. Reimbursement for Your Time and Other Cash Payments

You may be eligible for reimbursement and cash payments up to \$20,000 for:

- **time you spent** protecting your identity or recovering from identity theft, up to 20 hours at \$25 per hour
- **money you spent** protecting your identity or recovering from identity theft, like the cost of freezing or unfreezing your credit report or unauthorized charges to your accounts
- **up to 25% of the cost of Equifax credit monitoring or identity protection products** you bought between September 7, 2016 and September 7, 2017

3. Free Identity Restoration Services

You are eligible for **free identity restoration services** for at least 7 years that you can use if someone steals your identity or you experience fraud.

Next Steps

The claims process will start after court approval. To learn more about the settlement, go to ftc.gov/Equifax. We'll update that page when there's new information.

You can also [sign up to get FTC email updates](#) about this settlement.

If you were affected by the breach, you may also receive an email notification after the court approves the settlement. The notification will provide more information about the settlement, the benefits available to people impacted, and how to request the services offered under the settlement.

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA
ATLANTA DIVISION**

In re: Equifax Inc. Customer
Data Security Breach Litigation

MDL Docket No. 2800
No. 1:17-md-2800-TWT

CONSUMER ACTIONS

Chief Judge Thomas W. Thrash, Jr.

**AMENDED ORDER GRANTING FINAL APPROVAL OF SETTLEMENT,
CERTIFYING SETTLEMENT CLASS, AND AWARDING ATTORNEY'S
FEES, EXPENSES AND SERVICE AWARDS**

Consumer Plaintiffs and Defendants Equifax Inc., Equifax Information Services, LLC, and Equifax Consumer Services LLC (collectively, "Equifax"), reached a proposed class action settlement resolving claims arising from the data breach Equifax Inc. announced on September 7, 2017. On July 22, 2019, this Court directed that notice issue to the settlement class. [Doc. 742]. This matter is now before the Court on the Consumer Plaintiffs' Motion for Final Approval of Proposed Settlement [Doc. 903] and Motion for Attorneys' Fees, Expenses, and Service Awards to the Class Representatives. [Doc. 858]. For the reasons set forth below and on the record of the hearing of December 19, 2019, the Court grants both motions, issues its ruling on the pending objections and motions from various objectors that have been filed, and will separately enter a Consent Order relating to the business practice changes to which Equifax has agreed and a Final Order and Judgment.

I. INTRODUCTION.

A. Factual Background and Procedural History.

On September 7, 2017, Equifax Inc. announced a data breach that it determined had impacted the personal information of about 147 million Americans. More than 300 class actions filed against Equifax were consolidated and transferred to this Court, which established separate tracks for the consumer and financial institution claims and appointed separate legal teams to lead each track.

In the consumer track, on May 14, 2018, plaintiffs filed a 559-page consolidated complaint, which named 96 class representatives and asserted common law and statutory claims under both state and federal law. [Doc. 374]. The complaint alleged claims including negligence, negligence per se, unjust enrichment, declaratory judgment, breach of contract (for those individuals who had provided personal information to Equifax subject to its privacy policy), and violation of the Fair Credit Reporting Act (“FCRA”), the Georgia Fair Business Practices Act (“GFBPA”), and various state consumer laws and state data breach statutes.

Equifax moved to dismiss the complaint in its entirety, arguing *inter alia* that Georgia law does not impose a legal duty to safeguard personal information, plaintiffs’ alleged injuries were not legally cognizable, and no one could plausibly prove that their injuries were caused by this data breach as opposed to another

breach. The parties exhaustively briefed the motion during the summer and early fall of 2018.

After the benefit of oral argument on December 14, 2018, the Court issued an order on January 28, 2019, granting in part and denying in part the motion to dismiss. [Doc. 540]. The Court allowed the negligence and negligence per se claims to proceed under Georgia law, finding among other things that the plaintiffs alleged actual injuries sufficient to support a claim for relief (*id.* at 15-21). The Court dismissed the FCRA claim, the GFBPA claim, the contract claims, and the unjust enrichment claims of those plaintiffs who had no contract with Equifax. The Court dismissed some state statutory claims, but allowed many others to proceed. Following the Court's order on dismissal, Equifax answered on February 25, 2019 [Doc. 571]. Before and after Equifax filed its answer, the parties engaged in significant discovery efforts and raised numerous discovery-related disputes with the Court in late 2018.

On April 2, 2019, after more than 18 months of negotiations, the parties informed the Court they had reached a binding settlement that was reflected in a term sheet dated March 30, 2019, and that had been approved the following day by Equifax's board of directors. After consulting and negotiating with federal and state regulators regarding revisions to the term sheet, the parties entered into the final settlement agreement on July 19, 2019, and presented the final settlement agreement

to the Court on July 22, 2019. (App. 1, ¶¶ 17-24).¹ After a hearing on July 22, 2019, the Court entered an order directing notice of the proposed settlement (“Order Directing Notice”) [Doc. 742]. In the Order Directing Notice, the Court found that it would likely approve the settlement as fair, reasonable, and adequate, and certify the settlement class.

B. Terms of the Settlement.

The following are the material terms of the settlement:

1. The Settlement Class.

The settlement class is defined as follows:

The approximately 147 million U.S. consumers identified by Equifax whose personal information was compromised as a result of the cyberattack and data breach announced by Equifax Inc. on September 7, 2017.

Excluded are (i) Equifax, any entity in which Equifax has a controlling interest, and Equifax’s officers, directors, legal representatives, successors, subsidiaries, and assigns; (ii) any judge, justice, or judicial officer presiding over this matter and the members of their immediate families and judicial staff; and (iii) any individual who timely and validly opts out of the settlement class. [Settlement Agreement, Doc. 739-2, ¶ 2.43].

¹ References in this Order to “App.” refer to the declarations comprising the Appendix [Doc. 900] accompanying the pending motions.

2. The Settlement Fund.

Equifax will pay \$380,500,000 into a fund for class benefits, attorneys' fees, expenses, service awards, and notice and administration costs; up to an additional \$125,000,000 if needed to satisfy claims for certain out-of-pocket losses; and potentially \$2 billion more if all 147 million class members sign up for credit monitoring. [Doc. 739-2, ¶ 7.8; Doc. 739-4, ¶ 37]. No settlement funds will revert to Equifax. [Doc. 739-2, ¶ 5.5]. The specific benefits available to class members include:

- Reimbursement of up to \$20,000 for documented, out-of-pocket losses fairly traceable to the breach, such as the cost of freezing or unfreezing a credit file; buying credit monitoring services; out-of-pocket losses from identity theft or fraud, including professional fees and other remedial expenses; and 25 percent of any money paid to Equifax for credit monitoring or identity theft protection subscription products in the year before the breach. If the \$380.5 million fund proves to be insufficient, Equifax will add another \$125 million to pay claims for out-of-pocket losses.
- Compensation of up to 20 hours at \$25 per hour (subject to a \$38 million cap) for time spent taking preventative measures or dealing with identity theft. Ten hours can be self-certified, requiring no documentation.
- Four years of specially negotiated, three-bureau credit monitoring and identity protection services through Experian and an additional six years of one-bureau credit monitoring and identity protection services through Equifax. The Experian monitoring has a comparable retail value of \$24.99 per month and has a number of features that are typically not available in "free" credit monitoring services offered to the public. (App. 6, ¶¶ 33-43). The one-bureau credit monitoring shall be provided separately by Equifax and not paid for from the settlement fund.

- Alternative cash compensation (subject to a \$31 million cap) for class members who already have credit monitoring or protection services in place and who choose not to enroll in the enhanced credit monitoring and identity protection services offered in the settlement.
- Identity restoration services through Experian to help class members who believe they may have been victims of identity theft for seven years, including access to a U.S. based call center, assignment of a certified identity theft restoration specialist, and step by step assistance in dealing with credit bureaus, companies and government agencies.

Class members have six months to claim benefits (through January 22, 2020), but need not file a claim to access identity restoration services. (*Id.*, ¶¶ 7.2 and 8.1.1). If money remains in the fund after the initial claims period, there will be a four-year extended claims period during which class members may recover for certain out-of-pocket losses and time spent rectifying identity theft that occurs after the end of the initial claims period. (*Id.*, ¶ 8.1.2). If money remains in the fund after the extended claims period, it will be used as follows: (a) the caps for time and alternative compensation will be lifted and payments will be increased *pro rata* up to the full amount of the approved claims; (b) up to three years of additional identity restoration services will be purchased; and (c) the Experian credit monitoring services claimed by class members will be extended. (*Id.*, ¶ 5.4). Equifax will not receive any monetary or other financial consideration for any of the benefits provided by the settlement. (*Id.*, ¶ 7.3).

3. Injunctive Relief.

Equifax has agreed to entry of a consent order requiring the company to spend a minimum of \$1 billion for data security and related technology over five years and to comply with comprehensive data security requirements. Equifax's compliance will be audited by an experienced, independent assessor and subject to this Court's enforcement powers. [*See generally* Doc. 739-2, pp. 76-84; Doc. 739-4, ¶ 44].

According to cybersecurity expert Mary Frantz:

[I]mplementation of the proposed business practice changes should substantially reduce the likelihood that Equifax will suffer another data breach in the future. These changes address serious deficiencies in Equifax's information security environment. Had they been in place on or before 2017 per industry standards, it is unlikely the Equifax data breach would ever have been successful. These measures provide a substantial benefit to the Class Members that far exceeds what has been achieved in any similar settlements.

[739-7, ¶ 66]. Equifax's binding financial commitment to spend \$1 billion on data security and related technology substantially benefits the class because it ensures adequate funding for securing plaintiffs' information long after the case is resolved. (*See id.*, ¶ 56).

4. Notice And Claims Program.

The notice plan [*see* Doc. 739-2, p. 125], was developed by class counsel and the Court-appointed notice provider (Signal Interactive Media), with input from the claims administrator (JND Legal Administration) and the regulators. (App. 1, ¶ 25). The notice plan is not designed merely to satisfy minimal constitutional

requirements, but an innovative and comprehensive program that takes advantage of contemporary commercial and political advertising techniques—such as focus groups, a public opinion survey, and micro-targeting—to inform, reach, and engage the class and motivate class members to file claims. According to the plaintiffs and Signal, the notice program is a first-of-its kind effort and is unprecedented in scope and impact. The Court finds that the notice program is a significant benefit to the class.

The notice program consists of: (1) multiple emails sent to those whose email addresses can be found with reasonable effort; (2) a digital and social media campaign using messaging continually tested and targeted for effectiveness; (3) a full-page ad in *USA Today* using plain text designed with input from experts on consumer communications at the Federal Trade Commission as well as a national radio advertising campaign to reach those who have limited online presence; (4) a settlement website on which the long-form notice and other important documents, including various pleadings and other filings from the litigation, are posted; and (5) the ability for class members to ask questions about the settlement via email and a toll-free number staffed with live operators. (App. 4, ¶¶ 43-57, 85-90; App. 5, ¶¶ 22-30). Signal will continue digital advertising during the extended claims period and until identity restoration services are no longer available, a period that will last for seven years. [Doc. 739-2, pp. 127, 138].

JND transmitted the initial email notice to 104,815,404 million class members beginning on August 7, 2019. (App. 4, ¶¶ 53-54). JND later sent a supplemental email notice to the 91,167,239 class members who had not yet opted out, filed a claim, or unsubscribed from the initial email notice. (*Id.*, ¶¶ 55-56). The notice plan also provides for JND to perform two additional supplemental email notice campaigns. (*Id.*, ¶ 57).

The digital component of the notice plan, according to Signal, reached 90 percent of the class an average of eight times before the notice date of September 20, 2019, approximately 60 days before the deadline for objecting and opting out. Signal's digital campaign achieved 1.12 billion impressions on social media, paid search, and advertising before the notice date, far surpassing the original target of 892 million impressions. (App. 5, ¶ 24). Signal is expected to deliver an additional 332 million impressions during the remainder of the initial claims period (*id.*, ¶ 25), many more digital impressions than initially anticipated. Signal also placed a full-page notice that appeared in the September 6, 2019 issue of *USA Today*. (*Id.*, ¶ 26). The radio campaign, which ran from August 19 through September 8, 2019 in 210 markets across the country, resulted in 194,797,100 impressions overall and 63,636,800 impressions for the target age group least likely to be reached online. (*Id.*, ¶¶ 27-28).

Finally, the settlement received a great deal of media coverage in virtually

every U.S. market, increasing exposure and reach to class members. The settlement was featured prominently by CNN, in the *New York Times*, and on the Today Show, among other national media outlets. (*Id.*). From July 22, 2019 through December 1, 2019, there were approximately 30,000 mentions related to the data breach or the settlement in the media. (*Id.*, ¶ 90).

As a result of the notice program and extensive media coverage, the response from the class has been unprecedented. The settlement website received 46 million visits during the first 48 hours following preliminary approval and, as of December 1, 2019, the total number of visits to the website exceeded 130 million, with nearly 40 million discrete visitors. Most significantly, with several weeks left in the initial claims period, the claims administrator has received in excess of 15 million claims from verified class members, including over 3.3 million claims for credit monitoring. (*Id.*, ¶¶ 5, 64-69). The claims rate, to date, thus exceeds 10% of the class.

These claims and others that continue to be filed are governed by a detailed claims administration protocol, which employs a variety of techniques to facilitate access, participation, and claims adjudication and resolution. (App. 4, ¶¶ 4, 71). JND has also developed specialized tools to assist in processing claims, calculating payments, and assisting class members in curing any deficient claims. (*Id.*, ¶¶ 4, 21). As a result, class members have the opportunity to file a claim easily and have that claim adjudicated fairly and efficiently.

5. Attorneys' Fees And Expenses And Service Awards.

Class counsel have applied for a percentage-based fee of \$77.5 million, reimbursement of \$1,404,855.35 in litigation expenses, and service awards of \$2,500 for each settlement class representative totaling no more than \$250,000 in the aggregate. [Doc. 858]. These amounts are in accordance with the terms of the settlement agreement and were not negotiated by the parties until after the negotiations regarding the relief to be afforded to the class had concluded. Under prevailing precedent and the circumstances of this case, these requests are reasonable, and for the reasons set forth in more detail below, the requests will be approved.

6. Releases.

In pertinent part, the class will release Equifax from claims that were or could have been asserted in this case. The releases are set forth in more detail in the settlement agreement. [Doc. 739-2, ¶¶ 2.38, 2.50, 16].

II. FINAL APPROVAL OF PROPOSED SETTLEMENT AND CERTIFICATION OF SETTLEMENT CLASS.

The Court, having considered the Settlement Agreement and Release including all of its exhibits [Doc. 739-2]; all objections and comments received regarding the settlement; all motions and other court filings by objectors and *amici curiae*; the arguments and authorities presented by the parties and their counsel in their briefing; the arguments at the final approval hearing on December 19, 2019;

and the record in this action, and good cause appearing, hereby reaffirms its findings in the Order Directing Notice, finds the settlement is fair reasonable and adequate, and certifies the settlement class.

A. The Proposed Settlement Is Fair, Reasonable, And Adequate.

Before the Court may finally approve a proposed settlement, it must consider the factors listed in Rule 23(e)(2) including whether “(A) the class representatives and class counsel have adequately represented the class; (B) the proposal was negotiated at arm’s length; (C) the relief provided for the class is adequate, taking into account: (i) the costs, risks, and delay of trial and appeal; (ii) the effectiveness of any proposed method of distributing relief to the class, including the method of processing class-member claims; (iii) the terms of any proposed award of attorney’s fees, including timing of payment; and (iv) any agreement required to be identified under Rule 23(e)(3); and (D) the proposal treats class members equitably relative to each other.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(e)(2). As explained below, consideration of each of these factors supports a finding that the settlement is fair, reasonable, and adequate and should be approved.

1. The Class Was Adequately Represented.

The first prong of Rule 23(e)(2) directs the Court to consider whether the class representatives and class counsel have adequately represented the class. Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(e)(2)(A). Traditionally, adequacy of representation has been considered in