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In this issue: Maine tax code, spam calls, genetic test war, kids and money

Maine tax code now conforms (partially) to Federal code

Highlights of the bipartisan Maine tax conformity law passed this fall: standard deductions for the 2018 tax year will increase to match the new higher federal levels; Maine will retain the existing personal exemptions for individuals and joint filers (though personal exemptions are now eliminated from federal taxes), provide a new \$300 credit for qualifying children or dependents, and increase the state's property tax fairness credit. In a departure from new federal tax law, Maine will not impose a \$10,000 deduction cap on property taxes. Please bear in mind that the ability for higher income taxpayers to benefit from Maine's personal exemptions, dependent tax credit, property tax fairness credit, and the standard/itemized deduction is subject to income phase out provisions. For more details, see the Maine Revenue Services [Enacted Tax Legislation](#) page.

Don't call me - please

Some tips from the *AARP Bulletin's* recent article "Stopping Spam Calls":

- Your first impulse may be to ignore phone calls from spammers, but if the call goes through to your voicemail, it can signal to the spammer that your phone number is active. Instead, answer the call, but don't say anything. Your voice activates the robocall (or a transfer to a call center). No sound on your end will often disconnect the call, and future callbacks from that number are less likely. If it is a call from a "live" caller, let them speak first, and then hang up if you don't want to take the call.
- Landline users can press *77 to block calls listed as "anonymous" or "private" (from callers who choose not to allow their number to be displayed on Caller ID). *87 will deactivate this feature.
- Smartphone tricks: to block unwanted numbers on an iPhone, tap the circled "i" icon next to the call number, and scroll down to tap Block This Caller. On Android phones, tap the calling number and select Block Number under Details.
- Don't call back if the phone only rings once – especially if the area code is 268, 809, 284, or 876.
- Check with your mobile phone service provider to see if they offer any free apps for flagging or blocking spam calls.
- In addition, the Social Security Administration has recently warned of an ongoing caller ID "spoofing" scheme: calls display the SSA's national customer service number, 1-800-772-1213, and the caller attempts to verify your Social Security number or other personal data, threatening termination of benefits or offering a benefit increase. If you receive a suspicious call from someone alleging to be from SSA, you should report that information to the Office of the Inspector General at 1-800-269-0271.

Do your homework on genetic testing

Using genetic testing companies to find out about ancestry and/or possible health risks has exploded in popularity. But give some thought to how your DNA information will be handled, stored, and possibly shared, including whether its authenticity can be trusted. Also check the company's privacy policy carefully.

The *Wall Street Journal* recently published an article, "What Consumers Should Know About Commercial DNA Testing", that raised these questions:

How useful are results about potential health risks? You might discover you are more likely to get a certain disease, but the full spectrum of your other risk factors (diet, family history, environment, etc.) should be evaluated by a physician or professional genetic counselor. False positives (and negatives) do occur. (One very small study found a **40%** error rate in analyses by consumer genetic testing companies.) Also, research linking DNA to a particular disease is continually subject to new developments and re-evaluations. Avoid companies that offer diet advice or partner selection based on your risk profile - they can't be relied upon as scientific.

Could genetic test information be used to discriminate against me or my offspring? Find out how your data may be used, especially if you opt to store your sample. Unlike healthcare providers, direct-to-consumer genetic testing companies are not subject to HIPPA privacy protection laws, and their own privacy policies – however stringent they may be as of this writing - could change over time. It's not hard to imagine insurance companies looking for a window to obtain data about an applicant before insuring them. Though federal law *currently* bars health insurers from using your genetic information to determine eligibility or coverage, that doesn't apply to companies insuring for life, disability, or long term care.

Before proceeding with testing, evaluate how specific the information provided by the company will be. If you find out you are 50% "Eastern European" and 50% "Western European" based on today's map borders, you may not discover much more than you knew to begin with. If you opt to receive a list of people who may be part of your extended family, realize there's a possibility you'll discover that you have a previously unknown birth parent or half-sibling!

Talking to kids about a taboo topic

Sex? No – money. *New York Times* columnist Ron Lieber has authored a book, [*The Opposite of Spoiled*](#), which suggests that talking about money (and how to handle it) openly with young kids can help them become adults who are "grounded, generous, and smart about money." It's meant to be a practical guide to strategies for addressing all the money topics that come up as part of family life. Check it out and let us know what you learn from reading it.

Also, if you'd enjoy reading some heartwarming and beautifully written essays from five young college applicants who have already given some deep thought to money-related issues in the contexts of their family lives, click [here](#).

Have a great winter,



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