PRESS RELEASE

Bank of America urged to drop debit card fee

October 18, 2011

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Consumers Union Calls On Bank of America & Other Major Banks to Drop Unfair Debit Card Fees

CU: It's Unfair to Charge Customers When Banks Collect Enough From Retailers to Cover Debit Card Costs

SAN FRANCISCO, CA – Consumers Union called on Bank of America and other banks to drop plans to charge consumers monthly debit card fees. Bank of America recently announced it would charge its customers $5 each month starting in 2012 to make debit card purchases. SunTrust has started rolling out its own $5 fee and Wells Fargo and Chase are testing debit card fees in select markets.
"Americans are tired of being hit with new banking fees, especially since they've already paid to rescue firms like Bank of America, whose behavior helped spark the economic meltdown," said Norma Garcia, director of Consumers Union's financial services program. "This debit card fee just adds insult to injury. It's unfair for the banks to stick consumers with a monthly fee just to use their own money. Bank of America and other banks can still collect enough money from retailers to cover debit card costs."
Garcia added, "If Bank of America and the other banks refuse to drop the debit card fee, consumers should consider dropping them. There are plenty of banks and credit unions that don't charge debit card fees that will be more than happy to accept new customers."
Consumers Union has published a set of tips for consumers who want to switch banks (http://www.defendyourdollars.org/pdf/steps-moveyourmoney.pdf).
Below is Consumers Union's letter to Bank of America urging it to drop its debit card fee. Similar letters were sent to Chase, SunTrust, and Wells Fargo.
October 17, 2011
Brian T. Moynihan
Chief Executive Officer and President
Bank of America Corporation
401 N Tryon Street
Charlotte, NC 28202
Re: Drop the $5 Debit Card Usage Fee
Dear Mr. Moynihan:
Recent news accounts have indicated that Bank of America will begin charging many of its checking account customers a $5 monthly fee for debit card purchases starting in 2012. This fee will be charged even when consumers use the card only once in that month. Consumers Union, the public policy and advocacy division of Consumer Reports believes your decision to charge consumers a new monthly fee to use their own money for debit card transactions is both ill-timed and unfair. Accordingly, on behalf of America's financial services consumers, we urge you to withdraw these plans immediately.
Consumers should not be required to pay a costly fee that appears to be arbitrary and designed to generate income to make up for Bank of America's bad business decisions rather than covering the costs of providing debit card services. Banks can still collect approximately 24 cents from retailers every time a customer makes a debit card purchase. That's much more than the median 8 cents the Federal Reserve estimates it costs a bank to process a debit purchase (http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2010-12-28/pdf/2010-32061.pdf) when consumers use a PIN number.
Bank of America plans to take dollars from consumers it says it lost when the Federal Reserve decided that banks could not charge retailers high and anticompetitive debit interchange fees to process debit card transactions. Not only is Bank of America trying to make up for ill-gotten profits by heaping a new fee on consumers, it is doing so even though Bank of America actually saves money when consumers rely more on debit cards instead of paper checks, which are more costly to process.
The public wants to know why it is that you plan to charge your customers $5 monthly, or $60 per year, more to access their own money, especially when taxpayers rescued Bank of America with a $45 billion loan just a few years ago. It seems unjust and indefensible for Bank of America to now levy a costly new fee on consumers in a struggling economy, especially when the fee is not related to the cost of providing the service. This fee is especially egregious, imposed as it is during a weak economy, when many consumers are struggling to keep afloat.
Two weeks ago, Consumers Union urged Congress and Federal regulators to investigate Bank of America's controversial new fee. We also gave consumers an opportunity to tell members of Congress what they think about the new fee. Within 24 hours of sending out our e-mail action alert, nearly 40,000 consumers heeded our call and sent a message to their representative calling for an investigation. We hope Congress and Federal regulators will get to the bottom of this unfair debit card fee. But Bank of America need not wait until an

investigation is underway to reverse its plans. Consumers Union urges you to act now to do what is right and to do what is responsible—immediately withdraw your plans to charge checking account customers $5 to use their debit card for purchases.

Make no mistake about it. American consumers are outraged by Bank of America's ploy to convince the public that this fee is necessary because of new regulations. Now that banks must disclose all their fees up front, consumers can objectively decide for themselves whether you are telling the truth and we are hearing that consumers do not like what they see. One consumer we heard from said it best: "I am tired of the banks and other financial institutions trying to collect more than their fair share." We couldn't agree more. We urge you to reverse your decision to impose a $5 monthly fee on your debit card customers. Consumers will thank you for it.

Please respond to our letter by Wednesday, November 2, 2011 to advise us of your position.

Very truly yours,

Norma P. Garcia
Senior Attorney
Manager, Financial Services Program
Consumers Union
Contact: Michael McCauley, mmccauley@consumer.org, 415-431-6747, ext 126 (office) or David Butler, dbutler@consumer.org or Kara Kelber, kkelber@consumer.org, 202-462-6262

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