

DEBIT CARD FEES CAN ADD UP

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Anxiety levels are running high for consumers struggling to make ends meet and survive the lengthy economic downturn.

That's particularly true for New York's aging population, many of whom are on a fixed income. The last thing New Yorkers need right now is to be surprised by a "checkout fee" just for using their debit cards.

State law prohibits retailers from applying such fees to credit card sales, but it's silent on other types of cards.

Penalizing a consumer for paying responsibly with a debit card seems very unfair. Many of us use debit cards to make everyday purchases because we like their convenience, speed and security -- and it helps us to spend within our means.

A checkout fee on top of the sticker price takes money out of the pockets of seniors and hard-working citizens. Those fees can add up.

Every dollar captured by a checkout fee is one less dollar from a senior's fixed income than can be spent elsewhere to generate more economic activity.

Consumers rightfully expect to find no difference between the advertised price and what they pay at the checkout counter.

Yet, if the state Legislature doesn't close this loophole, that's exactly what customers will find when they try to pay with their debit card.

A bill introduced by Sen. Eric Schneiderman, D-Manhattan, and passed by the Senate would prohibit checkout fees on debit card purchases. S.7267-C deserves the Assembly's priority in passing it and Gov. David Paterson's signature.

Laura Cameron

NYS Association of Area Agencies on Aging

Albany

laura@nysaaaa.org