

## Weather Financial “Rainy Days”

(NAPS)—As families take measures to protect their basements from seasonable storms in the months ahead, Loretta Abrams, senior vice president of Consumer Affairs, HSBC–North America, also suggests the following steps to prepare your finances for the proverbial “rainy days.”

### **Know your current credit condition—sunny and clear? Partly cloudy? Raining?**

- A strong and healthy credit score is more important than ever. Aim for a score of 720 or better.

- Review and take action to correct any errors on your credit report.

- You are entitled to receive one free credit report annually, from each of the three designated credit-reporting agencies. Request your free credit report at [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com) or call (877) 322-8228.

- Maintain and improve your credit score:

1. Pay all bills on time and, if possible, pay more than the minimum.

2. Don't max out your credit cards (maintain balances at no more than 30 percent of credit limit).

3. Don't open credit that you don't need.

### **Bring out your umbrella—know the tools to protect your credit and identity**

- Be vigilant to protect yourself from schemers, scammers and identity thieves:

1. Never pay anyone to “stop your foreclosure” or “clean up your credit report.”

2. Never transfer title to your property to a third party to “avoid foreclosure.”

3. Never share personal financial information with a stranger on the phone.

- Carefully review every bank statement and credit card billing



statement for signs of unauthorized use.

- Shred any personal documents before discarding.

### **Check the forecast**

- Develop a budget plan for now and the future.

- Save on routine expenses: Shop the sales, clip coupons and take advantage of free services.

- Contact your lenders if you anticipate future financial difficulties.

- If you run into problems with your mortgage and prefer to speak first to a trusted third party about your options, call Homeowner's HOPE™ Hotline, 888-995-HOPE. You can also dial (800) 569-4287 or visit [www.HUD.gov](http://www.HUD.gov) for a HUD-approved counselor.

### **Build your storm shelter**

- Build and bulk up your emergency fund to cover three to six months of expenses.

- Do not touch your retirement fund. Seek experts' advice regarding any needed adjustments.

- Ensure adequate insurance protection (health, disability, property and auto).

- Prioritize paying down debt and pay the credit card that has the highest interest rate.

Take advantage of free resources on [YourMoneyCounts.com](http://YourMoneyCounts.com), available in both Spanish and English, to find information that will help you manage your finances and weather the financial storm.