A Fragile Balance: Emergency Savings and Liquid Resources for Low-Income Consumers, edited by Center for Financial Security Faculty Director J. Michael Collins, is available March 12, 2015 from Palgrave Macmillan. The book highlights the importance of emergency savings to households’ financial well-being and presents 10 innovations designed to promote emergency savings among lower-income households. A Fragile Balance is available direct from the publisher and through online sellers including Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Powell’s.

For more information about the book and the Center’s work on emergency savings, please visit emergencysavings.org.

About the book

Existing policies and programs that promote savings largely focus on longer-term savings—often for retirement, education, or homeownership. These policies and programs commonly prevent consumers from using their savings for other purposes, or heavily penalize them for doing so. Meanwhile, emerging research highlights the importance of shorter-term, unrestricted “emergency savings” to households’ financial well-being. Emergency savings helps families weather unexpected expenses and drops in income, and allows them to take advantage of unanticipated opportunities.

A Fragile Balance opens by making the case why emergency savings deserves more attention from the public, nonprofit, and for-profit sectors, and turns to the failure of federal policy to support emergency savings among lower-income consumers. The bulk of the book then outlines specific innovations in savings policies, products, and services aimed at supporting emergency savings. Each chapter is by an expert contributor and engages critical questions around the scale, institutional capacity, sustainability, accessibility, and effectiveness of existing and proposed programs. Although many Americans across the income distribution lack emergency savings funds, A Fragile Balance focuses on lower-income consumers, who often have the least options for finding cash in a pinch.

What others are saying

“A Fragile Balance shines a spotlight on the realities families face when trying to set aside money for unexpected emergencies. Hopefully this book will serve to educate, motivate, and challenge the Fin-Tech industry to develop scalable solutions with positive returns on investment that help consumers overcome behavioral biases and inspire change.”

Frank Kaplan, Senior Vice President for Business Development, NetSpend Corporation
“Liquid savings are an essential tool that can help families weather economic shocks and build a brighter future. But in today’s economy, building even a modest financial cushion is harder than ever. This book goes far beyond making the case for emergency savings – it points a path forward with crisp analysis and creative solutions. It is a must read for anyone who is serious about strengthening household economic security in America today.”

Andrea Levere, President, Corporation for Enterprise Development

“The Federal Reserve Board’s 2013 survey on economic well-being found that only 48% of respondents would be able to come up with $400 in emergency expenses. Anyone who has faced an unexpected bill knows the stress that that creates—and the stress is even higher when there are no savings. When so many families are financially fragile, this timely volume describes promising savings programs that can insulate millions from financial ups and downs.”

Beadsie Woo, Senior Associate, Annie E. Casey Foundation

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