

AG Kaul, DFI Secretary Blumenfeld: Warn about, encourage reporting of potential COVID-19 charity scams

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MADISON, Wis. – As the State of Wisconsin continues to respond to the coronavirus outbreak, Attorney General Josh Kaul and Department of Financial Institutions Secretary Kathy Blumenfeld are encouraging consumers to exercise caution when donating to a charity and to report suspected charity scams.

“Wisconsinites are generous, and I have no doubt that many, many people are going to be supporting organizations participating in coronavirus relief efforts. Those who are making charitable donations can take some simple steps to help make sure their donations are going where they’re meant to,” said Attorney General Kaul. “And if you learn about a potentially fraudulent request for a charitable donation, we ask you to contact the Department of Financial Institutions.”

“During these uncertain times, people are more vulnerable to charity scams,” said DFI Secretary Kathy Blumenfeld. “With a little research and a few precautions, you can help ensure your donations go to organizations that are genuinely serving others, and help us identify potential charity scams.”

Actions consumers may take to avoid charity scams:

Do Your Research

- Search DFI’s online registry to see if an organization is registered in Wisconsin and review its financial reports: <https://wdfi.org/charitableorganizations/>. Under Wis. Stat. § 202.12, most fundraisers and charitable organizations soliciting donations are required to register and report each year. Although not every

charity needs to register, the fact that an organization isn't registered can be a red flag.

- See how the charity has been rated by watchdog organizations such as the BBB Wise Giving Alliance, Charity Navigator, Charity Watch, and Guidestar.
- Search the charity's name online with words like "complaint" and "scam."

Ask Questions

- What are the charity's website, address, and mission?
- How much of your donation will go directly to services, not fundraising?

Be Careful How You Pay

- If someone asks you to send cash, wire money, or donate by gift card, don't do it. It's safer to pay by credit card or check.
- If you're donating online, check that the webpage where you enter your payment information has "https" in the address. This means your financial information is secure.

Watch Out for Scammers' Tricks

- Scammers can spoof caller ID to make their fundraising calls look like they're from your local area code, a Wisconsin area code, or from an organization you know.
- Scammers might attempt to pressure you into donating immediately before you have time to do any research. A legitimate charity will welcome your donation at any time.

How to Make a Complaint

Individuals who have information about a suspected charity scam are encouraged to report that information to DFI. You can submit a complaint online at <https://www.wdfi.org/CharitableOrganizations/forms/dfi-dccs-2255.pdf>.