



For Immediate Release
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Contact: Robyn Ziegler
312-814-3118
877-844-5461 (TTY)
rzeigler@atg.state.il.us

*******CONSUMER ALERT*****CONSUMER ALERT*******
MADIGAN WARNS CONSUMERS OF ILLINOIS LOTTERY E-MAIL SCAM

Chicago – Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan today is warning consumers about an unsolicited e-mail currently circulating claiming that the recipient has won the Illinois Lottery. The e-mail is part of a scam designed to defraud money and gain personal information from consumers. It is not authorized by the Illinois Lottery, which never notifies winners by e-mail.

In this Illinois Lottery scam, e-mail recipients are asked to respond by sending an e-mail to an agent in which they quote a reference, batch and winning number found in the original e-mail and provide their full name, address and telephone number. After sending the response e-mail containing this personal information, the winners are directed to a bank in Nigeria where their winnings are allegedly located, claiming that the Lottery is expanding globally. Contrary to these assertions, the Illinois Lottery does not conduct any business in Nigeria or any other foreign country.

This scam involves a common form of check cashing fraud that requires the recipient to wire money based on the false premise that the money is needed to cover the courier costs allegedly incurred for sending a prize-winning certified check to the recipient's door step. The people conducting the scam ask the recipients to keep the information confidential until their claim is processed, alleging that the security measures are important to avoid fraud. However, the Illinois Lottery does not ask their players to pay for courier costs or any other costs when claiming their winnings.

Madigan is urging consumers not to respond to these fake Illinois Lottery e-mails. Illinois consumers who have sent money or divulged personal information in response to this fraud should contact the Attorney General Office's Consumer Fraud Hotline at 1-800-386-5438 (TTY: 1-800-964-3013). The Spanish-language Hotline number is 1-866-310-8398. Consumers outside of Illinois can file a consumer complaint by downloading the complaint form at www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/consumers/conscomp.pdf.

In typical counterfeit cashier check scams, victims receive a realistic-looking phony check and do not discover it is fake until after depositing the check and wiring money back to the thief. As a result, victims can be left legally liable to their banks for thousands of dollars. The scammers use high quality printers and scanners to make the checks look real. The counterfeit checks are often printed with the names and addresses of legitimate financial institutions, and

some of the checks even contain authentic-looking watermarks. Consumers should be aware that even if the bank account and routing numbers listed on a counterfeit check are real, the check still may be fake.

Madigan noted that the so-called Nigerian letter scam continues to be a popular form of fake check fraud. Although this scam has many permutations, it almost always begins when a con artist asks the consumer—by mail, e-mail, phone, or fax—to help him or her move a large amount of cash out of a foreign country.

If consumers take the bait, they then receive an authentic-looking phony check in the mail with instructions to deposit it and wire a large portion of the funds to an overseas address. If they do as instructed, consumers can then be liable to the bank for all of the money they wired overseas in addition to any of the proceeds they have already spent.

“No matter how the fake check scam is pitched to the consumer, the bottom line is the same,” Madigan said. “Whether you’re being offered a ‘lottery jackpot,’ an overpayment for something you’re selling, or the opportunity to help ‘deposed royalty’ transfer the family fortune to another country,” Madigan cautioned, “if someone is sending you a check and asking you to wire some portion of it back, you are being set up for trouble.”

Madigan said that many fake check scam victims mistakenly believe that a check must be good if their bank accepts it for deposit and makes the funds available to them. However, consumers should be aware that banks are required by federal law to make funds from a check available to consumers within a relatively short period of time. As a result, Madigan noted, “making the funds available to you is not the same as confirming that the check is authentic. It takes days, even a week or more, for a bank to determine that a check is a forgery.”

Madigan and the Illinois Lottery warn consumers to be aware of these Lottery scams and suggest the following tips on how to avoid them:

- If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is. You cannot win a lottery for which you did not buy tickets. If you receive a “winner” notice for a drawing you never entered, be suspicious.
- Never give money or valuables to a stranger to redeem a lottery prize. “Good faith” money or banking information is never required by the Illinois Lottery to claim a prize.
- Know who you’re dealing with, and never wire money to strangers.
- Never accept a collect call from anyone claiming to be a Lottery official.
- Never reveal your credit card and/or bank information to anyone unless you are certain the contact is legitimate and from a reputable company with whom you have a long-term relationship. The Illinois Lottery only requires credit card information when you contact them directly to purchase or renew a Lotto or Little Lotto subscription.

- If you receive a telephone call from a direct marketer who promises instant lottery prizes, hang up. Lotteries in the U.S., including the Illinois Lottery, do not conduct business in this matter.
- If you accept payment by check, ask for a check drawn on a local bank, or a bank with a local branch. That way, you can make a personal visit to make sure the check is valid. If that's not possible, call the bank where the check was purchased, and ask if it is valid. Get the bank's phone number from directory assistance or an Internet site that you know and trust, not from the check or from the person who gave you the check.
- If the representative insists that you wire back funds, end the transaction immediately. Legitimate groups don't pressure you to send money by wire transfer services. In addition, you have little recourse if there's a problem with a wire transaction.

Report suspicious "lottery" material to the Federal Trade Commission at www.ftc.gov or call 1-877-FTC-HELP. You can also contact the Illinois Lottery at www.illinoislottery.com or at 800-252-1775.

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