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MADIGAN FILES LAWSUIT AGAINST WHEELING TRAVEL COMPANY FOR FAILURE TO PROVIDE REFUNDS TO CONSUMERS

Attorney General Urges Consumers to Be Alert for Fraud During Summer Travel Season

Chicago - Attorney General Lisa Madigan today urged consumers to use caution when scheduling travel plans and summer vacations as she announced a lawsuit filed today against a Wheeling, Ill., tour guide company for repeatedly failing to provide refunds to consumers after cancelling scheduled trips.

"Summer is a popular time for trips and guided tours," Madigan said. "It's important that consumers remain extremely cautious when scheduling their group tours or travel plans. Make sure you check out the organization's standing with agencies like my office's Consumer Fraud Bureau and the Better Business Bureau, and get everything in writing before you pay."

Madigan's lawsuit, filed in Cook County Circuit Court, alleges that Cospers & Cospers Group Tours and its owners, William and Gayle Cospers have accepted nearly \$24,000 from vacation planners for scheduling guided tours throughout the country but have repeatedly failed to pay refunds to consumers in the instances when those tours have been cancelled. As an example, in October 2008, at least 14 Illinois residents contracted with the defendants for a four-day trip to the Smoky Mountains. Consumers paid the defendants from \$630 to \$1,518 each for deluxe motor coach transportation, accommodations, meals, guided Smoky Mountain tours, a Dollywood Entertainment and Music Park pass, and trip cancellation insurance. Madigan's complaint alleges that approximately five days before the trip, defendants cancelled the trip but failed to pay refunds to the customers.

The Attorney General's lawsuit also alleges that the defendants failed to provide consumers with:

- Information about a refund policy, including a written statement of the consumers' right to a prompt refund if the trip is canceled through no fault of the consumers;
- Information on the existence of a trust account, which state law requires so that consumers' upfront payments are protected in case events and vacations are cancelled through no fault of the traveler; and
- The name of the transportation company under contract to transport the travelers during tours.

Madigan's suit asks the court to enter a permanent injunction barring the defendants from doing business in Illinois. The lawsuit also asks the court to order the defendants to pay restitution for consumers who have lost money as a result of travel plans that the company cancelled, civil penalties of \$50,000 for violating the Illinois Consumer Fraud and Deceptive Business Practices Act, and an additional \$50,000 for each violation committed with the intent to defraud.

Assistant Attorney General Sarah Poulimas is handling the case for Madigan's Consumer Fraud Bureau.

Madigan offered the following tips to consumers looking to book travel plans this summer.

- If at all possible, deal with an established travel firm from which you have previously received satisfactory service or a firm recommended by friends and family.
- Check your contract and schedule carefully. Any transportation, lodging, meals or other items that are not specifically mentioned may not be included.
- Ask about your right to cancel and the availability of cancellation insurance.
- Get all information in writing before you pay.

Consumers who want to file a complaint with Madigan's office can download a complaint form from the Attorney General's Web site at www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov or call the Consumer Fraud Hotline at:

Chicago Consumer Fraud Hotline: 1-800-386-5438

Springfield Consumer Fraud Hotline: 1-800-243-0618

Carbondale Consumer Fraud Hotline: 1-800-243-0607

Spanish Language Hotline: 1-866-310-8398

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