



January 15, 2010

## MADIGAN WARNS DONORS TO BE WARY OF SCAMS TIED TO EARTHQUAKE RELIEF EFFORTS IN HAITI

### *Attorney General Urges Contributors to Research Charities Before Donating*

Chicago — Attorney General Lisa Madigan today urged Illinois residents who plan to donate to earthquake relief efforts underway in Haiti to be on the lookout for fundraising scams by con artists seeking to exploit the natural disaster for their personal profit.

"At this time when the people of Haiti desperately need help, I want to encourage wise giving to make sure that donations go toward legitimate causes that will directly contribute to relief efforts," Madigan said. "Unfortunately, it's common to hear of fraudulent charities taking advantage of people's generosity in the wake of catastrophes. Before sending money, Illinoisans should ask questions, gather information about the organization and donate only when you're satisfied that your money will be used in an appropriate manner."

Donors who are seeking to give to the Haitian earthquake relief efforts should be wary of requests for **clothing, food or other in-kind donations, which may not be appropriate**. Unless the charitable organization has the staff and infrastructure to distribute such aid, the donations may be more of a burden than a help. Ask the charity about their transportation and distribution plans. Be wary of those who are not experienced in disaster relief assistance.

In addition, potential donors should **find out if the charity is providing direct aid or raising money for other groups**. Donors may want to avoid the middleman and give directly to charities that have a presence in the region. The Attorney General advised that donors may want to ask questions to determine the ultimate recipients of the donations to ensure that the organizations are equipped to effectively provide aid.

Under Illinois law, fundraisers and charitable organizations are required to register each year with the Attorney General's office. To assist potential donors in making wise giving decisions, the Attorney General's office provides important information about charitable organizations such as income, expenditures, and programs. This information is available at <http://www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/charities/index.html>.

To best ensure that your donation will be used for its intended purpose, Attorney General Madigan suggested the following tips:

- **Ask how much of your donation will go to the charity and how much will be used to pay fund-raising costs.** Solicitors must give you this information if you ask.
- **Pay close attention to the name of the charity.** Some fraudulent charities use names that sound or look like those of legitimate organizations to mislead you.
- **Ask questions about the charity.** Donate only when your questions have been answered and you are certain your money will be used according to your wishes. Ask questions like whether the charity is registered with the Illinois Attorney General's office and what percentage of the money the charity takes in goes to fundraising, administration and charitable programming.
- **Do not pay in cash.** For security and tax record purposes, pay by check. Be sure to write the full official name of the charity on your check—do not abbreviate.
- **Request written information.** A legitimate charity will provide you with information outlining its mission, how your donation will be distributed, and proof that your contribution is tax deductible.
- **Do not donate if the solicitor uses high-pressure tactics, asks for cash payment or insists on sending someone to pick up your donation.** These are all hallmarks of a scam.

Madigan encouraged donors to report suspicious solicitations to her office's Charitable Trust Bureau by calling 312-814-2595. The Attorney General recommended that, whenever possible, keep notes detailing the date and time of the call, the organization's name, and the name of the solicitor. She also suggested trying to remember the "pitch" as well as any other pertinent information.

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