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MADIGAN SUES CHICAGO AREA MARKETER FOR ACAI BERRY DIET SCAMS***Madigan Joins FTC in National Consumer Crackdown Against Diet Product Schemes***

Chicago — Attorney General Lisa Madigan today sued a Chicago area man for fraudulently marketing acai berry dieting schemes online, as part of a national crackdown with the Federal Trade Commission against affiliate marketers that con consumers into purchasing weight loss products through phony news websites.

Madigan filed suit in Cook County Circuit Court against Ishmael Lopez Jr., of Sauk Village, Ill. The Attorney General alleges Lopez operates websites featuring fake news articles that advocate for acai berry diet products and other items, ranging from bodybuilding supplements to teeth whitening agents.

“Consumers across the country visit these fake marketing sites that are carefully – and illegally – disguised to represent professional news organizations, only to wind up unknowingly debited for extra diet products,” Attorney General Madigan said. “These Internet con artists are profiting from their purposely deceptive marketing ploys.”

The Attorney General alleges that when consumers click on links from Lopez’s sites, including thecnnews.org, cnnewsat6.com, newslines07.com, they are transferred to other websites to sign up for “free” trial product offers. But, Madigan said, consumers are actually automatically enrolled in a subscription that charges them for additional products—unless the consumer cancels within a 14-day period. Consumers are not notified of the cancellation requirement.

Madigan said Lopez’s fake news reports failed to disclose that he profited in promoting the products and touted deceptive benefits of the products, including statements that some acai berry products would result in 12- to 30-pound weight loss in four weeks without any diet or exercise.

The lawsuit asks the court to require Lopez pay restitution to consumers with unresolved complaints. It also seeks to impose on the defendant a civil penalty of \$50,000, additional penalties of \$50,000 for each violation found to be committed with the intent to defraud, as well as \$10,000 per violation found to be committed against a person 65 years or older.

Assistant Attorney General Adam Sokol is handling this case for Madigan’s Consumer Fraud Bureau.

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