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MADIGAN WARNS OF SUSPECTED TORNADO RELIEF SCAM

Attorney General Urges Contributors to Research Charities Before Donating, Opens Investigation of Potential Charitable Scam Targeting Illinois Residents

Chicago – Attorney General Lisa Madigan today announced her office has opened an investigation into improper fundraising tied to relief efforts underway in Washington, Ill., and other downstate Illinois communities hit by Sunday's tornadoes and severe storms. Madigan urged Illinois residents who want to donate to the recovery efforts to be cautious in their giving.

"Unfortunately, in the wake of such devastation, we almost always receive reports of questionable fundraising efforts that try to take advantage of people wanting to help," Madigan said. "My office is investigating a complaint, and we will continue to monitor for improper fundraising efforts and possible scams connected to the disaster relief underway. I urge anyone who wants to donate to carefully research the organizations they intend to give to so they know their contribution will directly benefit the victims of Sunday's storms."

Madigan's Charitable Trust Bureau received a complaint regarding Heroes Memorial Foundation, an unregistered, out-of-state entity raising funds for victims of the weekend storms. Under Illinois law, fundraisers and charitable organizations are required to register each year with the Attorney General's office. Investigators from Madigan's office also are assisting local authorities in Washington, Ill., to monitor for consumer scams related to recovery and rebuilding efforts.

To assist potential donors in making wise giving decisions, Madigan's office provides [important financial information](#) about charitable organizations such as income, expenditures, and programs.

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 fundraising 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 detailed 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.
- If you receive an **email or text message asking for a donation, confirm that the request is from the charity** by contacting the charity or visiting its website.
- **Do not assume that charity recommendations on Facebook, blogs, or other social media have already been vetted.**

Donors may also consider giving to a specific program or purpose within a charity – for example, disaster relief. If a website has a "donate" button, see whether you can designate a specific purpose for your donation. If you cannot, contact the charity to be sure your donation will be spent for the purposes you intend.

The Attorney General's office also advised that donors should be wary of requests for **clothing, food or other questionable in-kind donations**. 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.

Madigan encouraged donors to report suspicious solicitations to her office's Charitable Trust Bureau by calling (312) 814-2595. Madigan 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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