



December 12 2016

CONSUMER ALERT

ATTORNEY GENERAL MADIGAN: INVESTIGATE BEFORE DONATING TO CHARITABLE CAUSES FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Chicago —With requests for charitable contributions filling up your mail and email inbox, Attorney General Lisa Madigan today encouraged residents to do some important research before making holiday donations to any of the more than 25,000 charitable organizations in Illinois working to help others this holiday season and all year long.

Under Illinois law, charitable organizations, along with professional fundraisers, are required to register and file annual financial reports with the Attorney General's office. Potential donors may then access this information, including income, expenditures, program details and administration costs, before giving to a charity.

"There are many wonderful organizations making a real impact in communities across Illinois, but it's important to take time to research an organization before you donate to ensure your contribution will be used to further the charitable mission you want to support," Madigan said.

Madigan offered the following tips to research a charity before donating:

- **Ask how much of your donation will go to the charity** and other detailed questions, including whether the organization is registered and how much of your donation 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.
- **Do not pay in cash.** For security and tax record purposes, pay by check, credit card or a format of payment in which you have a record. 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 payment in cash or insists on sending someone to pick up your monetary/financial contribution.** 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,** and not an imposter, by contacting the charity or visiting its website.
- **Be cautious of "look-alike" websites.** These fraudulent websites will often ask for personal financial information and may download harmful malware onto your computer.
- **Don't assume that charity recommendations on Facebook or social media are legitimate and have already been scrutinized.** Research the charity yourself.

Madigan also noted additional national resources for researching charities:

- **GuideStar National Database of U.S. Charities:** GuideStar provides detailed profiles of more than 640,000 nonprofit organizations nationwide. Its searchable database is sponsored by the nonprofit Philanthropic Research Inc. For more

information, visit www.guidestar.org.

- **Top-Rated Charities:** The American Institutes of Philanthropy (AIP) rates more than 400 charitable organizations using a variety of criteria, including percentage of revenue spent on administrative costs. The AIP website lists those charities which have received their highest rating, grouped by topic. For more information, visit www.charitywatch.org/toprated.html.
- **Philanthropic Advisory Service Reports:** Sponsored by the BBB Wise Giving Alliance, this site provides evaluations and profiles of charities that solicit nationally or have national or international program services and includes descriptions of programs, fundraising methods and finances. For more information, visit www.give.org.

To obtain financial information, learn more about an organization, or find out if a charity that has solicited you for a donation is registered, visit Attorney General Madigan's [website](#) or contact her Charitable Trust Bureau at 312-814-2595 (TTY: 1-800-964-3013). To report possible charity fraud, you can submit a complaint via Madigan's website: www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov.

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