Public Safety Fund-Raisers

You may be solicited from time to time to contribute to fire or police service organizations. Because police and firefighters risk their lives for the safety of your community, you may feel it is appropriate to show your support with a donation. You may even feel you are contributing to local public safety. Sometimes, however, these organizations are not charitable; instead they may be unions or social groups that will not use your donation for charitable purposes. What's more, having the words "police" or "firefighter" in the organization's name doesn't necessarily mean that local police and firefighters even belong to the group.

As is the case when contributing to any charity or organization, asking questions is the best way to make sure your donation supports activities that are important to you. Find out how your money will be used and distributed, and ask for written information, including the organization's name, address, telephone number and other financial information. Once you are assured that your money will be used in ways you consider appropriate, you can be confident in making your contribution.

Kwame Raoul
Attorney General

Some Facts About Police and Firefighter Solicitations

- Some police and firefighter organizations are not charitable but instead are unions or social groups that will not use your donation for charitable purposes.
- Police officers and firefighters never know you contributed.
- Any coercive statement, direct or subtle, that infers that giving is a way to get better protection or special treatment is a crime and should be reported to the respective police department, the State's Attorney and the Attorney General's office.
- Having the words "police" or "firefighter" in an organization's name does not mean police or firefighters are members of the group.
- Paid professional fund-raisers make most of the solicitations for police and firefighter organizations. Professional fund-raisers often charge 80 to 90% of your contribution as a fee.
- "Advertising" in so-called "ad books" will probably not reach the general public, and usually less than 20% of the money you contribute benefits the police, firefighters or community.
- Donations to some police or firefighter groups may not be tax deductible.

Investigate to make sure your donation will be used according to your wishes.

Ask fund-raisers for identification. Illinois law requires paid fund-raisers to identify themselves as such and to name the organization for which they are soliciting.

Find out how your contribution will be distributed. What percentage of your contribution will go to the firefighter or police organization? Will your contribution be used locally?
Get written information.

Do not hesitate to call your local police or fire department to verify a fund-raiser's claim that they are soliciting on behalf of their organization. If the claim cannot be verified, report the solicitation to your local law enforcement officials.

Ask if your contribution will be tax-deductible. If you decide to donate, pay by a check made out to the official organization name–do not abbreviate.

Special Events Fund-Raisers

Police or firefighter groups sometimes hire professional fund-raisers that produce traveling circuses or variety shows as special fund-raising events. Tickets are usually sold over the phone or in person. If you express no interest in attending, the solicitor will often suggest you purchase tickets for handicapped or underprivileged children. In some cases, however, the number of children "eligible" to receive free tickets is limited and transportation is not provided. If you are considering purchasing tickets for this purpose, ask the following questions:

- How many children will benefit, and how are they selected?
- How many tickets have to be sold?
- How will the tickets be distributed?
- Is transportation for the children included?

Keep in mind that the public safety group you want to support may only receive a small portion of the total money raised once the promoter recoups costs associated with producing the event.

If you decide to purchase tickets, write a check payable to the nonprofit organization, not the person collecting the money or the company running the event. If you receive unsolicited tickets in the mail, you are in no way obligated to pay for them or return them to the promoter.

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