

March 7, 2022

ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL RECOGNIZES NATIONAL CONSUMER PROTECTION WEEK

Raoul Urges Residents to Be Alert for Scam Websites, Fraudulent Online Retailers

Chicago — In recognition of National Consumer Protection Week, Attorney General Kwame Raoul today urged residents throughout Illinois to exercise caution when making online purchases or accepting offers from online retailers and vendors.

National Consumer Protection Week starts March 7, and Attorney General Raoul is encouraging residents to be vigilant for fake websites and social media advertisements. As online shopping has increased throughout the pandemic, Raoul says scammers utilize such sites to steal people's personal information and money. In addition to offering tips to help people identify possible fraudulent websites and protect their personal information, throughout the week Raoul will be providing information to consumers about the top scams and fraud his office hears about from consumers.

"Online shopping has become more popular than ever over the course of the pandemic. As consumers purchase everything from clothing to household necessities online, it is critical that people exercise caution to avoid scams and fraudulent websites," Raoul said. "During National Consumer Protection Week, I encourage Illinois residents to visit my office's website and social media channels to learn about common scams and how to protect themselves."

Raoul recommends that consumers avoid websites or sellers that offer hard-to-find products that are not in stock at major retailers. People should also be wary of sites that offer incredibly low prices on popular items. Scammers can take advantage of websites such as Amazon, so consumers should exercise caution before buying from private sellers offering sold-out items or advertising brand-name products for thrift store prices. Consumers who make purchases from these vendors could receive a counterfeit product or nothing at all. Additionally, Illinois consumers should be aware that certain products, such as cannabis and the COVID-19 vaccine, cannot be legally purchased online for shipment or delivery.

People should also exercise caution with email solicitations and online ads on social media sites. Clicking unfamiliar links can allow scammers to install malware or result in identity theft. Common scams involve bogus hyperlinks, such as emails or text messages from fake package-delivery services with links to "tracking information" on orders that consumers did not make.

Attorney General Raoul is encouraging Illinois residents to shop smart online by taking the following steps:

- **Use trusted sites rather than shopping through a search engine.** Be sure you accurately enter website addresses, as scammers take advantage of misspellings of popular websites. Scammers register variations of legitimate website domains to lure consumers to bogus websites.
- **Watch out for website with misspellings, sloppy grammar and poor design quality,** which could be indicators that a website is fraudulent.
- **Price-check popular items through multiple retailers** to help determine if a deal is too good to be true.
- **Read reviews of unfamiliar businesses** to find out from other users if the website could be a scam. Perform an online search of a company's name along with the words "scam" or "review" when visiting new websites.

- **Pay for online purchases with a credit card** so that the transaction is protected by the Fair Credit Billing Act. Liability for fraudulent charges on credit cards is generally limited. Paying with a debit card or gift card may not offer such safeguards.
- **Exercise caution when entering personal information or downloading new software.** Scammers can steal your personal or financial information or install malware on your device that can result in identity theft.
- **Read the fine print.** Be on the lookout for hidden costs or purchases that could register you for monthly charges.

Also in recognition of National Consumer Protection Week, Attorney General Raoul highlighted the most frequent complaints the Attorney General’s office received during 2021.

Top 10 Breakdown

Raoul’s annual Top 10 list of consumer complaints ranks every complaint his office receives on a range of topics. The Attorney General’s Consumer Fraud Bureau saved consumers more than \$20 million through litigation and mediation in 2021 and collected more than \$25 million through enforcement actions. Raoul’s office received 900 complaints about internet purchases and auctions. Complaints ranged from people not receiving products for which they had paid to people receiving products that were different than those advertised. The office received a total 14,146 written complaints in 2021, in addition to tens of thousands of phone calls. Complaints about construction/home improvement, and consumer debt topped the list.

CATEGORY	NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS
1. Construction/Home Improvement (remodeling, roofs and gutters, heating and cooling, plumbing)	1,564
2. Consumer Debt (residential mortgage lending, banks/financial institutions, collection agencies)	1,174
3. Motor Vehicle/Used Auto Sales (as-is used cars, financing, advertising, warranties)	1,117
4. COVID-19 (price gouging, IDES/SBA fraud resulting from identity theft, entertainment/sporting events/travel, housing, credit/financial services)	1,020
5. Internet/Mail Order Products (internet and catalog purchases, TV and radio advertising)	961
6. Identity Theft (credit cards, data breaches, utilities, government document fraud)	915
7. Promotions/Schemes (phone scams, work at home scams, lottery scams, investment schemes, phishing)	843
8. Telecommunications (cable and satellite TV, telemarketing, wireless phones, phone service and repairs)	628
9. Motor Vehicle/New Auto Sales (financing, defects, advertising)	464

10. Motor Vehicle/Non-Warranty Repair (collision, engines, oil changes and tune-ups) 450

For more information or to file a complaint, visit [Raoul's website](#) or contact his office.

Identity Theft Unit

1-866-999-5630 (TTY: 1-877-844-5461)

Student Loan Helpline

1-800-455-2456

Consumer Fraud Hotlines

1-800-386-5438 (Chicago),
1-800-243-0618 (Springfield)
or 1-800-243-0607 (Carbondale)

Homeowner Helpline

1-866-544-7151

Spanish Language Hotline

1-866-310-8398