



State of Maryland AGENCY NEWS

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Maryland Attorney General and Secretary of State Offer Guidance for Donors This Giving Tuesday

BALTIMORE, MD (December 1, 2020) – Giving Tuesday this year comes with an increased sense of urgency and need. Many more Marylanders are experiencing hardship and turning to nonprofit organizations for basic needs and support. As a result, many of us may feel compelled to donate. For those that do choose to make a donation this Giving Tuesday, Maryland Attorney General Brian E. Frosh and Secretary of State John C. Wobensmith advise consumers to be vigilant and donate wisely.

“During the holiday season, scam artists abound,” said Secretary of State Wobensmith. “They steal hard-earned cash from unsuspecting donors. We urge donors to be on the alert for scam artists who may use the convergence of the pandemic and the holiday season as an opportunity to fleece you from your hard-earned cash.”

“Emergencies such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic often bring out the best in people, with neighbors helping neighbors,” said Attorney General Frosh. “Unfortunately, these uncertain times also can bring out the worst in people, particularly those seeking to profit from the misfortune of others. I strongly urge Marylanders to research a charity before donating, and avoid any charity or fundraiser that does not provide information on how donations are used.”

Here are some tips on how to avoid a charity scam this Giving Tuesday and all year round:

- Do some research before you give. Visit an online resource such as Charity Navigator (www.charitynavigator.org) that can give you in-depth information on thousands of charities. You can also search the name of a charity online to see if it’s been reported as a scam. Search the name of the charity plus “complaint,” “review,” “rating,” or “scam.” If you find red flags, it might be best to find another organization.
- Just because your friend on social media posts about a charity doesn’t mean it’s legitimate. Do your own research using the tools described here. Call or contact your friend offline and ask about the post and what they know about the charity.

- If a telemarketer calls you asking for a donation by phone, don't agree to give right away. Ask questions first, such as how much of your donation goes to the program, how the organization carries out its mission, what percentage of money it collects is used for program services, whether contributions are tax-deductible, and how much goes to fundraising and administration. Ask the caller to send you information by email or mail before you decide. (If they refuse, this is a red flag that the "charity" may not be legitimate and they are trying to scam you.)
- Watch out for names that only look like well-known charities – but aren't. Fake charities are hoping that you mistake them for the real deal. Pay close attention to the name and their logo (if they use one), and make sure that the charity you are donating to is the one you intended to give to.

The Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division offers tips on giving wisely and can be found at: <http://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/CPD%20Documents/Tips-Publications/147.pdf>.

Together with the Attorney General's Office, the Secretary of State's Office works to ensure that charitable contributions go to qualified charitable organizations and are used for their intended purpose. The Maryland Secretary of State registers and regulates charitable organizations and their professional solicitors who operate in Maryland. Current Maryland law mandates that charities are registered with the Secretary of State and reveal to the public their financial and programmatic activities. You can search the Maryland Charities Database found here: <https://sos.maryland.gov/Charity/Pages/SearchCharity.aspx> to see if a charity is registered in Maryland.

If you think that you have been a victim of a charity fraud or scam, contact the Office of the Secretary of State, Charities and Legal Services Division by email: DLInvestigations_SOS@maryland.gov or telephone: [410-974-5534](tel:410-974-5534)