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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

Funds Recovered from Sham Veterans Charity



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody and 10 other state attorneys general are recovering funds from a sham veterans charity based in Palm Harbor. The recovery follows a multistate investigation into Healing Heroes Network, Inc. and its former directors Stacey Spiegel, Allan Spiegel and Neal Spiegel, and a related entity, Hero Giveaways, LLC—a business formed by Stacey Spiegel and Neal Spiegel for their use of deceptive charitable solicitations, including misleading sweepstake mailers and a telemarketing campaign.

The multistate investigation revealed that the organizations falsely promised to use donations to help wounded veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan receive medical treatments. In 2016 and 2017, the charity also falsely claimed on social media that it dedicated 100% of its proceeds to wounded veterans. The investigation found that very little of the charitable contributions received by HHN were used to further this charitable mission. Instead, donations were used to pay professional fundraisers, online advertising fees, the salaries of Stacey Spiegel and son, Neal Spiegel, and to purchase t-shirts from a relative's apparel business.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "This is outrageous. The fact that anyone would exploit the service and sacrifice of our wounded military heroes to solicit money under false pretenses is deserving of the highest level of contempt. Fortunately, as a result of this joint action with my counterparts in other states, HHN will be banned from soliciting donations in Florida and we will claw back some of the unlawfully obtained donations."

The stipulated judgment approved by the Pinellas Circuit Court requires HHN and Hero Giveaways to permanently cease all charitable solicitations. Stacey Spiegel, Allan Spiegel and Neal Spiegel have also agreed to pay $95,000, which will be distributed to a veterans' charity that provides services similar to those HHN had represented it would provide. The defendants are also subject to a five-year ban from overseeing, managing or soliciting charitable contributions for any nonprofit organization.

In addition to Florida, the action was joined by the states of California, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Virginia and Washington. Assistant Attorney General Ellen Annaliese Bullock and Chief Assistant Attorney General Donna Valin of the Consumer Protection Division handled this action for the Florida Attorney General's Office.

This action follows similar actions taken by the Florida Attorney General's Office and other states to stop fraudulent charities affecting veterans and servicemen and women, resulting in recovery of donations totaling $2,340,572 that were redirected to charities that would apply the funds to assist veterans and the military. Three prior cases include a stipulated final judgment and permanent injunction against Help the Vets, Inc.; a settlement agreement with Vetmade Industries, Inc.; and a stipulated order for permanent injunction and monetary judgment against the American Veterans Foundation and Paul Monville.

To avoid charity scams, Floridians should:

- Research before giving. Search the charity's name online with words such as: scam or complaint. Look up the charity's name on the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services website or research the organization using CharityWatch.org, CharityNavigator.org and Give.org;
- Avoid paying with cash, gift cards or wire transfers. Payment by these methods is difficult to track and therefore, difficult to recover. Consider donating by using a credit card, which tends to be more secure and trackable;
- Be sure to know and trust the professional fundraiser who offers to send a courier to pick up a check or cash donation;
- Research the charity name and do not be swayed by the name of the charity alone. Often, charity names are selected to have an emotional impact on specific groups of donors. For example, many veterans' charity names often include the following words: veterans, heroes, wounded, injured and warriors. This doesn't always mean the charity will donate to the named groups or prioritize this group above others; and
- Ask what percentage of donations support charitable services. Also, ask for the charity's name, web address, physical location and phone number. It is a red flag if the charity or fundraiser is unwilling to answer questions.

The Florida Attorney General's Office publishes the Military Consumer Protection Guide annually with additional information for donors, service members, veterans and their families. To view the latest guide, click here. Attorney General Moody's Scams at a Glance program highlights other military or veteran related scams and can be accessed here.

The Florida Attorney General's Office also has a Military and Veterans Assistance Program to help raise awareness and assist military members and veterans on types of scams that target

their communities. For more information on MVAP, click here.

If anyone is aware of a scam targeting our service members, veterans, or their families, they should report it to the Florida Attorney General's Office by calling 1(866) 9NO-SCAM or file a complaint online at MyFloridaLegal.com.