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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

AG Moody Participates in Crackdown on Deceptive Income Schemes



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody's Office today announced *Operation Income Illusion,* a nationwide crackdown on scams that target consumers with false promises of income and financial independence. The impact of these scams has intensified this year as scammers take advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic and financial crisis to exploit jobseekers. Attorney General Moody is joined by the Federal Trade Commission and other federal, state and local law enforcement partners in *Operation Income Illusion.*

Highlighted in the nationwide crackdown is Attorney General Moody's action against FirstUSA Business Development Inc—filed last month in Pinellas County. The complaint filed against FirstUSA alleges that the company induced consumers through telemarketing calls to purchase business coaching products and services, supposedly designed to help consumers start or improve a home-based internet business, but resulted in some consumers losing thousands of dollars without earning the profits promised or, in some instances, not even receiving the products or services. The defendants marketed these services to consumers in Florida and across the country.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "Income scams prey on people who find themselves in financially vulnerable situations, such as a sudden loss of employment or imminent retirement with inadequate funding. With high unemployment and the ongoing financial impact brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, more and more people are looking for innovative ways to make

ends meet, making them more susceptible to income scams. Sadly, these scams produce the opposite results for income seekers—instead of gaining a paycheck, they lose money. I am proud to work with our federal and state partners to actively identify, investigate and stop these schemes in Florida and nationwide."

Operation Income Illusion encompasses more than 50 law enforcement actions against the operators of work-from-home and employment scams, pyramid schemes, investment scams, bogus coaching courses and other schemes that can result in consumers losing thousands of dollars. According to a new analysis of FTC complaint data, income scams have a massive effect on consumers. Consumer complaints filed with the FTC show that consumers lost more than $610 million to these scams since 2016, with reported losses of more than $150 million in the first nine months of 2020.

The Attorney General's action against FirstUSA Business Development alleges that the corporation and owner, Todd Myers, violated the Florida Deceptive and Unfair Trade Practices Act by inducing consumers to pay thousands of dollars for services and products with false promises that they would increase the profitability and success of consumers' home-based businesses. Consumers reportedly lost hundreds of thousands of dollars as a result of the defendants' practices.

Attorney General Moody is seeking a permanent injunction banning the defendants from making false or misleading statements to consumers to solicit purchases or to retain business, along with refunds for victimized consumers.

To view the complaint, click here.

Steps consumers can take now to guard against income and job scams include:

- Take your time. Avoid high-pressure sales pitches that require you to get involved now or risk losing out;
- Be skeptical about success stories and testimonials. Glowing stories could be fake and online reviews may have come from made-up profiles;
- Do not bank on a "cleared" check. If you're told to send some money or buy gift cards, it's probably fraud even if you see the money in your account;
- Be cautious of any employer offering employment without an interview;
- Do not provide your Social Security number, credit card number, or any other sensitive information to an employer unless you are confident that the employer is legitimate;
- Avoid vague offers. If the employer is not willing to specifically describe the position they are offering, you should exercise caution; and
- Research the company to ensure it is legitimate.

To learn more about income scams, click here.

Stay up to date on how you can protect yourself and your family from common and emerging scams. Visit Attorney General Moody's Scams at a Glance page, filled with downloadable resources and tips here.

Anyone encountering an income scam should immediately report it to the Florida Attorney General's Office by filing a complaint online at MyFloridaLegal.com or by calling 1(866) 9NO-SCAM.