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OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL STATE OF FLORIDA

Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

AG Moody Gains Restitution for Victims of Certificate of Status Scam

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody today announced a settlement that provides restitution to businesses scammed into purchasing unnecessary corporate certificate services. The proposed stipulated consent judgment, submitted today to the court for approval, resolves an action filed by the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division against Leandro Rodriguez, owner of Florida State Filing Corporate and Certificate Filing Service, for sending deceptive and misleading solicitations to businesses regarding the certificates. The solicitations gave the misleading impression of being from the state and sought payment for a certificate of status that the solicitations falsely indicated were required by the state. Certificates of status are not required to do business in the State of Florida. Attorney General Moody encourages businesses and individuals who purchased the unnecessary certificates to contact the Florida Attorney General's Office.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "This individual tricked Florida businesses into purchasing certificates of service under the guise that the documents were necessary to continue operating legally. This is an outright scam and my office is taking action to secure restitution for victims of this deception that targeted businesses in Florida. If you or anyone you know purchased one of these unnecessary certificates, please contact my office."

In 2018, the Florida Attorney General's Office filed an action against the defendants and immediately secured a temporary injunction and asset freeze to stop the defendants' deceptive conduct. The defendants were soliciting Florida businesses with deceptive advertisements. According to the state's filed complaint, thousands of businesses responded to the defendants' solicitations.

Prior to September 2018, businesses and some individuals paid $68.42 for each fraudulent certificate, after which the price increased to $78.42 for the certificates. A business has the option to purchase various types of certificates directly from The State of Florida at a cost of $10 or less, but none of the certificates are required to operate in Florida. As a result of the defendants' mailers, thousands of consumers were affected and more than 100 complaints were filed with the Attorney General's Office against Florida State Filing Corporate and Certificate Filing Service.

The Florida Attorney General's Office obtained more than $75,000 in restitution as part of a proposed stipulated consent judgment filed today in the lawsuit. The consent judgment must still be approved by the court. In addition to the restitution payment, the defendants also agreed to no longer send any solicitations that appear to originate from the government or sell any products that a consumer could get from the government for free or at a lower cost.

To read the agreement, click here.

If you are a victim of this operation and wish to seek restitution, contact the Florida Attorney General's Office a 1(866) 9NO-SCAM or visit MyFloridaLegal.com to file online.