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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

CA: AG Moody Takes Action to Stop COVID-19 Grant Scams



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody is issuing a Consumer Alert to warn Floridians about a new scam targeting seniors with offers of fake COVID-19 grants. The Florida Attorney General's Office is receiving reports from seniors offered thousands of dollars in federal grant money to stay isolated at home to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Scammers are contacting seniors via Facebook Messenger, email and text message to offer these sham grants and request upfront payment as insurance for the expedited delivery of grant money.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "This scam appears to involve an international criminal organization utilizing a multifaceted communications plan to deceive seniors. These criminals are hacking Facebook accounts to send messages to targets from a friend's profile—creating the illusion that the grant program is being promoted by an acquaintance. Once contact is made, the criminals request personal information, bank account numbers and insurance payments purportedly to help ensure the safe delivery of thousands of dollars in federal grant money, and of course, the money is never sent.

"Sadly, we have uncovered evidence that some are falling for this scam. Please know that the federal government is not contacting seniors and offering them grant money to stay home and stop the spread of COVID-19. We are actively working with law enforcement to investigate and stop this scam. You can help us by reporting suspicious messages to our office."

The scheme involved a mock website, since shut down, purporting to be hosted by the U.S. Department of Treasury. The site included videos of seniors endorsing the sham grant program.

As part of its active and ongoing investigation, Attorney General Moody's Office worked with law enforcement partners to have the sham website removed; yet there are concerns that scammers will simply move the site to a new location online. The recently disabled website address is https://usafederalgrantclaim.wixsite.com/grantinfo. Anyone who provided information and payments after visiting the site should contact the Florida Attorney General's Office.

To view a screenshot of the site, click here.

To view videos from the site, click here, here and here.

To avoid this new COVID-19 federal grant scam

- Know that the federal government is not contacting seniors and offering them grants to stay at home and stop the spread of COVID-19;
- Remember, requests for upfront payments of any kind, including through gift cards, money orders, wire transfers, bitcoin or insurance fees in exchange for a grant, loan or government benefit are red flags of a scam;
- Be wary of any COVID-19 related offers received via Facebook, even if the offer appears to come from a familiar account. Hackers can hijack social media accounts and send the account holders' friends or followers deceiving messages;
- Never click on links sent in unsolicited messages. These links could contain malware or connect the target to a website set up to obtain personal or financial information for nefarious purposes; and
- Watch out for websites or messages containing typos, grammatical mistakes or awkward word choices. Many sham websites are created by foreign scam artists struggling with the English language. Typos and grammatical mistakes in messages purporting to be from the government are red flags that a message is from an imposter.

To report grant scams or any other COVID-19 related fraud, contact the Florida Attorney General's Office by calling 1(866) 9NO-SCAM or visiting MyFloridaLegal.com.

Since the COVID-19 emergency declaration, Attorney General Moody has issued more than a dozen Consumer Alerts with information about emerging scams and tips to avoid fraud. To view the latest alerts and to stay up-to-date on COVID-19 related scams, visit the Attorney General's Consumer Alert webpage by clicking here.

For all the Attorney General's COVID-19 related releases and additional COVID-19 tips and resources, click here.

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The Florida Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division issues Consumer Alerts to inform Floridians of emerging scams, new methods used to commit fraud, increased reports of common scams, or any other deceptive practice. Consumer Alerts are designed to notify Floridians about scams and available refunds in an effort to prevent financial losses or other harm caused by deceptive practices. Anyone encountering a scam should report the incident to the Florida Attorney General's Office by calling 1(866) 9NO-SCAM or visiting MyFloridaLegal.com. To view recent Consumer Alerts and for other information about avoiding scams, visit MyFloridaLegal.com/ConsumerAlert.