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OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL STATE OF FLORIDA

# Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

## Investigations Lead to Arrest of HVAC Repairman

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody's Office today announced the arrest of a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning repairman for fraud. The arrest follows investigations by Attorney General Moody's Consumer Protection Division and the Office of Statewide Prosecution into former Bruno Total Home Performance owner Louis Bruno. Bruno, along with nine of his former employees, allegedly used high-pressure sales and scare tactics to induce consumers to purchase services and products that were not needed. The vast majority of Bruno's victims were seniors—some living on fixed incomes. Bruno's schemes involved defrauding consumers in the sale of HVAC services and products and submitting fraudulent consumer loan applications.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "I have said since taking office as Attorney General that I will not tolerate abuse of our seniors. Targeting seniors with fraudulent sales and scare tactics is disgraceful and criminal. My Office is taking action both civilly and criminally against these defendants to account for the fraudulent scams they perpetrated under the guise of serving consumers. Today's actions will help bring these defendants to justice and will seek to make these victims whole."

Cape Coral Police Chief David Newlan said, "My heart goes out to those that fell victim to this hideous crime to defraud people out of their money and jeopardize losing their homes. The law has prevailed bringing those responsible to justice, to pay for the crimes they have committed. The Cape Coral Police Department will always be there to protect its citizens and bring those to justice that break the law."

The arrest follows two separate investigations conducted by Attorney General Moody's Office of Statewide Prosecution in conjunction with Cape Coral Police Department and the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division. According to the investigations, Bruno and former employees allegedly tricked customers into signing contracts and, in other cases, forged customers' signatures.

According to reports from Attorney General Moody's Consumer Protection Division, the office received approximately 245 complaints, including 135 from seniors, alleging that BRUNO AIR misled consumers about the actual cost of the HVAC units to be installed and, in some instances, installed units that were different from those agreed upon by the consumers. In many instances, consumers alleged that BRUNO AIR tricked them into signing on electronic devices sales or financing documents that consumers were told were estimates or pre-loan qualifying documents.

Additionally, numerous consumers who obtained financing through BRUNO AIR allege the

company misrepresented the prices for the HVAC products and the terms of financing, and, in some instances, installed HVAC units before financing was approved. BRUNO AIR also allegedly submitted consumer financing applications without the consumer's authorization by forging signatures or copying and pasting signatures from another document. When consumers complained about these practices, BRUNO AIR often allegedly filed liens against the consumers' property or initiated foreclosure proceedings.

The complaint also alleges BRUNO AIR often began installation of HVAC units without obtaining the proper permitting, and in numerous instances, consumers were left with HVAC units that were either incomplete or incorrectly installed. According to the civil complaint, BRUNO AIR failed to return consumers' calls regarding the incomplete installation of HVAC units or the failure of units to pass inspection.

To view the complaint, click here.

According to Attorney General Moody's Office of Statewide Prosecution, Bruno and former employees allegedly schemed to defraud customers and lenders who participated in the PACE program, a financing program that is intended to assist consumers with energy-efficient improvements to their homes, including installation of more energy-efficient HVAC units.

According to the criminal investigation, Bruno and former employees used customers' personal identification information to submit PACE loan applications to potential lenders without the knowledge or consent of the customers. The applications contained false information, including grossly inflated monthly incomes and forged signatures. In many cases, forged signatures were notarized by Bruno employees and submitted as supporting documents for the loan applications. The loan proceeds were then directly deposited into a bank account maintained by Bruno.

Bruno and former employees are charged collectively with one count of scheme to defraud, a first-degree felony; 16 counts of fraudulent use of personal identification information, a second-degree felony; 15 counts of communication fraud, a third-degree felony; four counts of filing fraudulent papers in court to deprive someone of real property, a third-degree felony; and four counts of fraudulent use of a notary, a third-degree felony. If convicted, Bruno faces up to 385 years in prison and more than $290,000 in fines and restitution. Attorney General Moody's Office of Statewide Prosecution will prosecute the case.