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OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL STATE OF FLORIDA

Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

AG Moody, US Attorneys United to Stop COVID-19 Scams

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody and Florida's three United States Attorneys are joining forces to warn Floridians about scams related to the COVID-19 outbreak. Florida's top prosecutors at the federal and state levels are committed to preventing, pursuing and prosecuting anyone trying to take advantage of this pandemic for personal profit. Attorney General Moody and the top federal prosecutors are actively collaborating and cooperating in a concerted effort to stop scams relating to the coronavirus.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "We will not allow anyone to take advantage of Floridians trying to protect their health and the safety of their families during this global crisis. We are united with Florida's U.S. Attorneys in our commitment to pursue scammers exploiting this pandemic to rip-off our citizens, and we will continue to work diligently to ensure anyone targeting Floridians during this state of emergency is brought to justice."

U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Florida Lawrence Keefe said, "The real threat of this pandemic is bad enough on its own–but we are going to have zero tolerance for the added risk created by lowlife scammers who would prey on Floridians at a time when their focus needs to be on protecting their own health and well-being. We will be vigilant and aggressive in our efforts to find and stop anyone trying to make even one dirty dollar off the backs of anxious Floridians."

U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida Ariana Fajardo Orshan said the risk of scams is particularly high in her district, which is home to a large portion of Florida elders and has seen many of the state's confirmed COVID-19 cases, "As communities across our nation come together to confront the COVID-19 pandemic, know that my office will not waver in its commitment to protecting South Floridians, including our vulnerable seniors. We are focused on COVID-19 scams and will prioritize prosecuting fraudsters who try to capitalize on this health crisis."

U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Florida Maria Chapa Lopez said, "It's shameful the way some crooks feel no guilt about targeting our most vulnerable, trusting individuals. We will use every resource at our disposal to disrupt and dismantle their despicable acts."

The prosecutors' warning comes on the heels of U.S. Attorney General William Barr's directive on Monday for all U.S. Attorneys around the country to place a high priority on stopping scam artists trying to take advantage of the coronavirus situation. In a memo to the U.S. Attorneys, Barr wrote, "The pandemic is dangerous enough without wrongdoers seeking to profit from public panic and this sort of conduct cannot be tolerated."

The state's top prosecutors are emphasizing the importance of this effort in light of Florida's

large elderly population and reports of everything from bogus COVID-19 cures to phishing scams that purport to be official government health websites.

Some common scams being reporting around the nation include:

- Individuals and businesses selling fake cures for COVID-19 online;
- Phishing emails sent from entities posing as the World Health Organization or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and
- Malware being inserted onto mobile apps designed to track the spread of the virus.

Earlier this week, Attorney General Moody issued a Consumer Alert urging the public to beware of potential coronavirus scams when researching information about COVID-19. The Attorney General also activated Florida's Price Gouging Hotline for consumers to report allegations of illegal price increases related to the COVID-19 state of emergency.

To report price gouging or scams related to the COVID-19 emergency, call 1(866) 9NO-SCAM, visit MyFloridaLegal.com or download the NO SCAM app for free in the Apple and Android stores.

The three U.S. Attorneys said their offices are working with the Department of Justice's Consumer Protection Branch, Fraud Section and Antitrust Division to coordinate efforts to stop scammers preying on concerned Floridians. Citizens are asked to report potential scams to the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center at IC3.gov. In addition, the public can contact the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Florida's Public Trust Unit at USAFLN.Corruption@usdoj.gov or by phone at 1(850) 216-3873.