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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

CONSUMER ALERT: Report Suspicious Crowdfunding Charity Pages



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody is issuing a Consumer Alert to ask Floridians to report suspicious crowdfunding charity pages. Friday, the Florida Highway Patrol made the Attorney General's Office aware of a suspicious-looking page purporting to raise money for the family of a fallen FHP Trooper. In less than an hour, the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division, working with GoFundMe.com, secured the suspension of the page and the more than $500 that had been raised is being returned to donors.

The account in question featured the name and photo of FHP Trooper Joseph Bullock. Trooper Bullock, a 19-year veteran of law enforcement, was shot and killed in the line of duty last week. An investigation into his death is underway.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "Trooper Bullock is a hero, and people want to help honor his service by donating to his family. When FHP told us that someone unknown to the family might be trying to exploit the death of this brave law enforcement officer, I asked my Consumer Protection investigators to act quickly. Our office immediately contacted GoFundMe and the crowdsourcing site took swift action to protect the donations. The company has assured our investigators that these funds will only be released to a member of Trooper Bullock's family or returned to the donors—per its distribution policies."

Florida Highway Patrol Director Colonel Gene Spaulding said, "Trooper Bullock courageously served his country and the state for almost 24 years of his life. It is appalling to see that members of the public would attempt to benefit after Trooper Joseph Bullock paid the ultimate sacrifice. I'd like to thank Attorney General Moody for her swift action and support during this

time. Please keep the Bullock family and the Florida Highway Patrol in your thoughts and prayers."

It is very important for well-intentioned Floridians who want to create a crowdsourcing account to assist a stranger to inform the intended beneficiary of their plans before launching a page. Informing the beneficiary before soliciting donations on the beneficiary's behalf will help avoid any confusion and quell concerns that the charitable solicitation is a scam. According to GoFundMe, any charitable campaigns that cannot be quickly verified will be subject to suspension and removal.

For those who wish to donate to a worthy cause, Attorney General Moody is urging that they do their homework to ensure that their donations are actually going to the charities' stated causes. Below are a few steps Floridians can take to protect their donations:

- - Research the webpage creator's background and reviews before donating;
  - Know that there are many different crowdsourcing platforms, each with different terms of use and fraud investigation practices;
  - Check to see if the platform offers protections to donors should a campaign be found fraudulent;
  - Determine what percentage of any funds raised will go to the charity and what percentage goes to the platform; and
  - Search to see if there are any identical or extremely similar campaigns. It is possible that scammers copied a legitimate campaign to fraudulently attract donors.

If anyone encounters a fundraising page that appears suspicious, they should report it to the Florida Attorney General's Office by calling 1(866) 9NO-SCAM or by visiting MyFloridaLegal.com .

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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.