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OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL STATE OF FLORIDA

# Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

## Consumer Alert: Beware of Charity Scams in Wake of Devastating Earthquakes in Puerto Rico




TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody today issued a Consumer Alert to warn Floridians of the potential for charity scams in the wake of Puerto Rico's devastating earthquakes. Over the past couple of weeks, Puerto Rico has been experiencing earthquakes and aftershocks, leaving a massive amount of destruction. Relief efforts are underway to assist the victims of these tragedies. Generous Floridians want to help, but should take steps to make sure donations go to the intended cause.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "Over the past few years, Puerto Rico has been besieged by natural disasters and the recent earthquakes are creating dangerous conditions for Americans living on the island and those traveling there to assist with the recovery efforts. Floridians want to help, but before you give, please take a few steps to ensure your donation is going to those who truly need it and not a scammer exploiting the situation to steal from generous donors."

Below are tips for anyone wishing to donate to assist recovery efforts:

- Never give credit card numbers, gift card account numbers or bank account information to a caller on the phone or in response to an unsolicited email;
- Before donating over the phone or online, take steps to verify the charity or fundraising campaign;
- Avoid solicitors that use high-pressure tactics;

- Watch for charities with similar-sounding names or logos. It is not unusual for scammers to choose names that sound like the names of legitimate, widely-known charities;
- Look up the charity on CharityNavigator.org before giving;
- Research and review the organization carefully to understand how much of the donation will actually go towards the work of the charity as opposed to administrative expenses and overhead; and
- Check with the Internal Revenue Service to see if the tax-exempt organization filed an annual return or notice with the IRS. The IRS requires automatic revocation of a charity's tax-exempt status if it fails to return for three consecutive years. Publication of an organization's name on the Auto-Revocation List helps potential donors determine the status of a charity. To learn more, go to IRS.gov and search the Charities and Non-Profits topics.

Attorney General Moody is also offering the following tips to help generous Floridians spot and avoid crowdsourcing charity scams:

- 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 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.

Anyone with concerns about a fraudulent charity or crowdsourcing charity can report those concerns to the Attorney General's Office online at MyFloridaLegal.com or by calling 1(866) 9NO-SCAM.

Earlier today, Attorney General Moody launched a new Consumer Alert webpage full of tips and resources to help Floridians avoid scams. The webpage, MyFloridaLegal.com/ConsumerAlert, aggregates the latest OAG alerts about emerging scams, fraud tactics and what Floridians can do to avoid falling victim. For more information, and to view past Consumer Alerts, 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.*