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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

More Than $1 Million in Restitution Secured for Victims of Government Imposter Scheme

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody and the Federal Trade Commission today secured more than $1 million in restitution for small businesses targeted in a nationwide imposter scheme. Thomas Henry Fred, Jr., and his affiliated businesses, sent thousands of letters to small businesses designed to look like invoices from a government agency for the purchase of labor law posters. The letters directed the businesses to pay $84 for the posters or face fines of up to $17,000. The same labor law posters are available for free from government agencies. Through this scheme, Fred and his affiliated businesses received more than $800,000 from more than 9,000 businesses.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, “Florida entrepreneurs take risks and invest in their employees to the benefit of our state’s economy. It infuriates me that anyone would take advantage of responsible business owners trying to ensure they are in compliance with the law. I am proud of the investigative work of our Consumer Protection Division and the FTC to stop this government imposter scam and secure refunds for Florida’s small businesses.”

FTC Bureau of Consumer Protection Director Andrew Smith said, “Just because an invoice looks official doesn’t mean it is. If you get an official-looking bill that you don’t understand, call the government agency directly using the number you find online or in a local directory, not the one on the mailer.”

In addition to paying $1.2 million in restitution, the defendants are permanently banned from sending unsolicited direct mail to consumers, misrepresenting themselves as government agencies and misrepresenting that any goods or services they sell are being offered on behalf of a government agency.

To avoid small business scams like this one, follow these tips:

- Double-check suspicious mail by calling the organization using an independently-sourced number;
- Verify invoices by keeping a list of all suppliers and vendors used;
- Avoid buying supplies or materials over the phone, unless a prior relationship with the vendor exists; and
- Ask for verification of offers in writing.

For more information on avoiding small business scams, click here.

Report scams to the Attorney General's Office by calling 1(866) 9NO-SCAM or visiting MyFloridaLegal.com.