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OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL STATE OF FLORIDA

Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

VIDEO: Beware of Bahamas Charity Scams



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody today issued a Consumer Alert warning Floridians about potential charity scams exploiting Bahamian-recovery efforts. Hurricane Dorian made landfall in the Bahamas on Sept. 1st as a Category 5 hurricane. It carried maximum sustained winds of 180 mph and storm surge of up to 23 feet above normal tide levels, causing significant damage to infrastructure, knocking out electricity, leaving many people displaced and causing unknown numbers of injuries and deaths. Relief efforts are under way to assist the victims of this disaster. However, Attorney General Moody is warning Floridians to be on the look out for fraudulent relief charities or crowdsourcing campaigns that could be scams.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, “Hurricane Dorian is a deadly storm, and thankfully Florida was spared a direct hit. Sadly, our friends in the Bahamas weren’t so lucky. Unfortunately, when we see catastrophic events like these, we also see scammers rush in to prey on the good intentions of generous Floridians. Before you give to organizations seeking donations for Bahamas-restoration efforts, please take steps to ensure your donation is going to legitimate charities and entities.”

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. It is not unusual for scammers to choose names that sound like the names of legitimate, widely-known charities;
- Look up 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 donors 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.

The United States Agency for International Development's Center for International Disaster Information has created a website concerning Hurricane Dorian relief. It provides resources and information regarding charities providing aid to the Bahamas. That website can be viewed here.

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 (866) 9NO-SCAM.

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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 (866) 9NO-SCAM or visiting MyFloridaLegal.com.