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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

CONSUMER ALERT: AG Warns of Vacation Rental Scam



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody today issued a Consumer Alert about an increasingly common vacation rental scam that involves the use of fake online ads posted to deceive consumers. The fake listings, posted on sites such as Craigslist, are either of rental properties that are not actually available for rent or actual vacation listings hijacked by the scammer and the contact information changed. This can result in consumers showing up to fake rental properties where the actual residents are not aware that homes are listed or to addresses that are not the properties listed in the advertisements. A major red flag of this type of scam is if an immediate payment is demanded.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, “With many families on spring break or planning summer vacations, this type of scam can be more common. Renters should be wary of fake rental properties to ensure they are not being scammed and that family vacations are not ruined.”

Consumers can take steps to avoid falling victim to this scam. Before booking a rental property:

· Search for a reputable rental website that offers protection in the event of fraud or offers payment transfer options;

· Find websites that offer a payment portal, where money is held in escrow until the renter arrives at the property with keys in hand;

· Do not rely solely on email to contact the owner and be wary of foreign telephone numbers;

· Investigate the property and, if possible, visit the property before signing a contract or sending

payment;

· Check to see if there are additional rental listings for the property under another owner's name;

· Ask for additional photos. A legitimate owner or property manager can likely produce these with little difficulty, while a scammer is unlikely to have access to additional photos; and,

· Pay for a rental with a credit card, via PayPal or through a payment transfer option on the rental listing website, which makes it easier to dispute a fraudulent charge.

Anyone who encounters a vacation rental scam should immediately report it to the Florida Attorney General's Office by filing a complaint online at MyFloridaLegal.com or by calling 1(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 1(866) 9NO-SCAM or visiting MyFloridaLegal.com.