Mar 7, 2019

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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

Fla. Joins Nationwide Sweep to Stop Tech Support Scams



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody's Office today joined the United States Department of Justice, the Federal Trade Commission and other state attorneys general in a nationwide sweep to stop tech support scams. As part of the sweep, Attorney General Moody's Consumer Protection Division took action in three separate cases to shutdown tech support scams operating in Florida—with the latest court action filed today during National Consumer Protection Week.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "Tech support scams prey on people's fear and insecurity about technology to trick them into paying for repairs and services they do not need. These fraudsters often contact seniors hoping their inexperience with technology will make them easy targets. Our Consumer Protection Division is actively identifying, investigating and taking these unscrupulous fraudsters to court."

The complaint filed today against American PC Corporation, based out of Sunrise, accuses the company of deceiving consumers into purchasing unnecessary computer services and products. The complaint alleges that the corporation and owner, Raju Sharma, convinced consumers to pay up to $1,700 upfront for remote tech support services or software products using misleading and deceptive tactics.

The complaint alleges that the defendants cold called consumers and misrepresented that the consumers' computers were in imminent danger of a virus or hacker attack. In some instances, the defendants also allegedly falsely claimed affiliation with well-known American technology companies, such as Microsoft. Defendants then launched into a deceptive sales pitch that began with American PC remotely accessing consumers' computers, performing a phony diagnostic test and then falsely detecting viruses, malware or other security threats. Defendants allegedly

used these deceptive tactics to persuade consumers to pay upfront for the services and if a consumer declined to purchase the service or software, American PC allegedly employed high-pressure sales tactics, such as repeated cold calls and threats of computer hijacking.

American PC and Sharma are alleged in the complaint to have violated the Florida Deceptive and Unfair Trade Practices Act, the Florida Telemarketing Act, and the Telemarketing Sales Rule. Attorney General Moody is seeking a permanent injunction banning the defendants from selling tech support products and services, along with refunds for victimized consumers.

To view the complaint, click here.

In addition to the complaint filed today and as part of the nationwide sweep, Attorney General Moody is highlighting three additional actions taken against tech support scams:

• A federal court order of summary judgment on liability entered in January against the defendants in ongoing litigation filed jointly with the FTC against Vylah Tec LLC and others;
• A final judgment entered against Paul Cozzolino, a defendant in the Florida Attorney General's litigation against Fast Fix 123 filed in Palm Beach County; and
• A consent final judgment entered this month against defendant Dennis Rinker in the Fast Fix 123 litigation.

There are steps consumers can take now to guard against tech support scams. If someone receives a pop-up ad, call, spam email or any other urgent message about a computer virus or malware they should abide by these tips:

• Never click on any links or call the phone number provided;
• Do not send money, credit card numbers or any other financial information;
• Never give anyone control of a personal computer;
• Be aware that Microsoft does not display pop-up warnings and ask consumers to call a toll-free number about viruses or security problems; and
• Avoid going online without up-to-date security software.

Anyone encountering a tech support 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.