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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

Taking Action to Shutdown Imposter Scam



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—This National Consumer Protection Week, Attorney General Ashley Moody is urging Floridians to be aware of imposter scams. Attorney General Moody's Consumer Protection Division is also taking action to stop an imposter scam targeting Florida businesses. The division today filed a complaint against two Michigan brothers operating an imposter scam in Florida. According to the complaint, Joe and Steven Fata sent misleading solicitations appearing to originate from state government agencies to Florida businesses. The brothers posed as representatives of state agencies and offered what appeared to be government services for a fee.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "This imposter scam involved people posing as government agency representatives in an effort to trick business owners into purchasing public documents and services that are often available for much lower fees. We are also seeing an increase in reports of fraudsters pretending to be with the IRS, local utility companies and even law enforcement agencies. Floridians should remain on the lookout for imposter scams and do research before submitting any payments in response to a solicitation."

The complaint alleges the Fata brothers posed as government entities and offered to file annual reports and renew fictitious name filings for Florida businesses. Many of these public services are provided by the state, at a significantly lower rate. The victimized businesses often mistakenly believed that government agencies sent the solicitations and used the defendants' services.

The defendants operated under such names as Florida Council for Corporations, Florida

Assumed Name Services and Workplace Compliance Services. The Florida Attorney General's complaint seeks the return of all monies paid to the defendants by Florida businesses, as well as civil penalties.

This case is the most recent in a series of actions by the Florida Attorney General's Office against entities soliciting Florida businesses using deceptive documents that appeared to come from state governmental agencies. This case also marks the first litigation by the Florida Attorney General's Office that alleges a violation of the new Government Imposter and Deceptive Advertisements Act, section 817.417, Florida Statutes, enacted in 2018.

To view the complaint, click here.

Imposter scams ranked first among complaints made to the Florida Attorney General's Office in 2018. For self-identified senior complainants, age 60 or above, imposter scams ranked third in 2018.

To avoid falling victim to an imposter scam:

· Do not automatically trust the number listed on caller ID linked to a solicitation call;

· Be wary of any individual who calls or emails asking or demanding a money wire, prepaid debit card or gift card as payment;

· Never provide personal or financial information over the phone or via email in response to a solicitation;

· Contact the appropriate government agency or requesting entity before paying for a government service and verify whether the charge is necessary and actually payable to the government entity;

· Know that the Internal Revenue Service and law enforcement agencies will never call threatening to arrest you unless you provide immediate payment; and

· Remember that foreign lotteries are illegal, and legitimate sweepstakes do not require pre-payment to collect winnings.

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