Date August 06, 2021

Attorney General Moody's Week In Review - Aug. 6, 2021



Florida students go back to school next week and as a mother, I know firsthand that sending your kids back to school is an exciting, yet stressful event. It takes a lot of planning and shopping to make sure your student has the supplies they need to succeed in the classroom.
The good news is the state is holding a Back-to-School Sales Tax Holiday that ends on Monday, Aug. 9. The bad news is that scammers may use this opportunity to take advantage of students and parents.

According to a recent news report, fraudulent school supply advertisements are being seen more frequently on social media. The Better Business Bureau is also reporting an increase in scam emails and phone calls offering student loan forgiveness plans.

Amid all the back-to-school excitement, it can be easy to fall victim to these opportunistic schemes. That is why, this week, I issued a Consumer Alert to warn Floridians.

To avoid back-to-school scams, keep these tips in mind:

- Use a credit card when shopping online for additional consumer protection;
- Before providing information online, make sure the website is secure by identifying the padlock symbol by the URL or the “s” at the end of *http* in the address bar;
- Reach out to a trusted loan servicer to ask about the legitimacy of student loan forgiveness plan offers; and
- Know that legitimate companies will never solicit personal or sensitive information over the phone, by email or by text.

To read the Consumer Alert and learn more about back-to-school schemes, click here.

If you suspect that something is a scam, report it to my office by calling 1(866) 9NO-SCAM or visiting MyFloridaLegal.com.

By staying informed and reporting suspicious activity when you see it, you can help us build a Stronger, Safer Florida. Best of luck to our teachers, students and parents this school year!



In The News

Don’t get schooled by scammers, Florida AG warns, News 4 Jax

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Home health aide accused of stealing from Medicaid in St. Lucie County, CBS 12 News West Palm Beach

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Attorney General: Former care facility employee arrested after abusing resident with a disability, CBS 10 Tampa Bay

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Two Pensacola assisted living facility employees steal from elderly resident, abandon them on roadside, Florida AG says, WKRG Pensacola

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Two Escambia County caregivers arrested for stealing debit, ID cards from elderly, ABC 3 WEAR-TV

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Manager and employee of assisted living facility arrested for exploitation of an elderly person, FOX 10 News

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Protecting Floridians

Woman Convicted of Credit Card Fraud Involving Florida Seniors Sentenced to 15 Years in Prison



Attorney General Ashley Moody's Office of Statewide Prosecution secured a 15-year prison sentence for a woman convicted on multiple counts of credit card fraud and identity theft. NyKeshia Smith, a former convenience store employee, defrauded several customers by illegally obtaining credit card information. Smith then used the stolen information on shopping sprees. In one instance, a senior citizen left a debit card behind in the card reader after a transaction and Smith then stole the card. The court sentenced Smith as a habitual felony offender. Smith will serve 20 years of probation after the prison sentence and pay more than $6,500 in restitution, prosecution, defense and investigation costs.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "The defendant in this case went on a shopping spree with credit card information she stole from Florida seniors. Thanks to my Statewide Prosecutors, she will pay for her crimes with 15 years in prison and thousands of dollars in court-ordered restitution and fees." Read More

Manager and Employee of Assisted Living Facility Arrested for Exploitation and Theft Against an Elderly Person



Following an investigation by Attorney General Ashley Moody’s Medicaid Fraud Control Unit, Tavetta Lavetta Jones and Tekera Levine were arrested on charges related to abuse and exploitation of a senior. As employees of an assisted living facility in Escambia County, Jones and Levine were supposed to transfer the victim to sign bond paperwork. Instead, Jones and Levine, Jones's manager, abandoned the victim on the side of a road and took the victim’s identification card and debit card. Jones is charged with exploitation of an elderly person or disabled adult, and criminal use of personal identification information. Levine faces a charge of accessory after the fact.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, “The scheme concocted and carried out by these two caregivers is horrifying—the women abused their positions to steal a patient’s ID and debit card, then abandoned the senior victim on the side of the road. Thankfully, following an investigation by my Medicaid Fraud Control Unit, these suspects have been arrested and will face serious charges for this criminal scheme.” Read More

Former Intermediate Care Facility Employee Arrested for Abuse of Disabled Resident



Attorney

General Ashley Moody's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit and the Jackson County Sheriff's Office arrested a former Sunland Center Pathways of Marianna employee for abuse of a disabled adult. Aariran Devore Batson allegedly threw a disabled resident out of the door of a dining hall and then slammed the resident into a gate multiple times before placing the resident in a headlock. Investigators with MFCU received information regarding the alleged abuse from the Florida Department of Children and Families, Adult Protective Services program.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "It's heartbreaking and infuriating that a caregiver would abuse a patient entrusted to their care—especially in such a violent and horrific manner. I am glad we were alerted to this abuse and the suspect was apprehended before more harm could be inflicted." Read More

Attorney General Moody Highlights Crime Prevention Efforts Ahead of National Night Out Against Crime



Attorney General Ashley Moody is highlighting recent efforts to increase the safety of all Floridians ahead of this year's National Night Out Against Crime. While Florida's crime rate is down for the 50th straight year, homicides in major cities across the country are increasing. According to a news report, the number of murders committed in large cities nationwide during the first six months of 2021 increased 16% compared to the same period in 2020, and by 42% compared to the first six months of 2019. Additionally, line-of-duty deaths of law enforcement officers continue to increase at a tragic rate with 181 deaths nationally so far this year, with 13 deaths in Florida according to the Officer Down Memorial Page.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "Protecting Floridians is my top priority. It's a mission I have dedicated my entire career to advancing—first as a federal prosecutor, then as a judge and now as Florida's Attorney General. During the past two and a half years, we have improved existing crime fighting programs and innovated new ways to strengthen relationships between law enforcement officers and the communities they serve. All of these programs work toward our mission of reducing crime, improving public safety and building a Stronger, Safer Florida."

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Events

Award nominations for the 2021 Human Trafficking Summit are due Aug. 16. The 2021 Human Trafficking Summit will honor outstanding citizens for their efforts to end human trafficking in Florida. The four awards that will be presented at the summit include: Survivor Advocate of the Year, Community Advocate of the Year, Prosecutor of the Year and Law Enforcement Official of the Year.
To complete and submit an award nomination, visit HumanTraffickingSummit2021.com/Award-Nomination-Information.

