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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

Stopping a Rental-Listing Platform From Duping



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody, along with the Federal Trade Commission and five other states, is taking legal action to stop a rental listing platform that allegedly misled consumers. Roomster Corp. and its owners, John Shriber and Roman Zaks, allegedly paid for fake positive reviews to lure in consumers looking for affordable housing and then charged for access to phony listings. The alleged deceptive practices took tens of millions of dollars from largely low-income consumer renters.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, “The complaint filed today alleges these defendants deceived consumers looking for affordable housing options by filling the internet with fake reviews and other misrepresentations. The alleged deceptive acts siphoned tens of millions of dollars from mostly lower-income people seeking a rental property. I’m proud to take action today with the FTC and other states to hold Roomster accountable for their wrongdoing.”

Roomster operates a website and mobile apps where users can pay a fee to access living-arrangement listings, including rental properties, room rentals, roommate requests and sublets. The company claims to offer authentic and verified listings. However, in a complaint filed in federal court, Attorney General Moody, the FTC and other state partners allege that Roomster, along with Shriber and Zaks, used fake reviews and other misrepresentations to lure consumers to its platform and pay for access to listings that often turned out to be fake.

The complaint also alleges that Jonathan Martinez, doing business as AppWinn, deceptively promoted the Roomster platform by providing tens of thousands of fake four and five-star reviews. In a proposed order agreed to by Martinez and filed with the court, Martinez must pay thousands in restitution and will be permanently enjoined from selling consumer reviews, required to notify the Apple and Google app stores that Roomster paid Martinez for posting

reviews and must cooperate in the case against Roomster.

The complaint and proposed stipulated final order is filed in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York.

Florida is joined by the FTC and the following states in the action: California, Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts and New York.

To view the complaint, click here.

To view the proposed stipulated order against Martinez, click here.