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OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL STATE OF FLORIDA

Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

AG Moody's Office Recognized with Natl. Award



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—The United States Department of Transportation is awarding Attorney General Ashley Moody's Consumer Protection Division the 2022 Inspector General Partnership Award in recognition of its participation in Operation Moving Target. This recognition highlights the overwhelming success achieved by Attorney General Moody's Consumer Protection Division in investigating and stopping moving scams. The consumer protection investigations have led to approximately $27 million in fines and restitution against approximately 19 different moving firms.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "Attorneys and investigators in my Consumer Protection Division work hard to stop scams and protect Floridians. I am proud of the results they achieve and honored that these hard-working public servants are being recognized for their dogged efforts to shut down 19 fraudulent moving firms and recover millions in fines and restitution."

Here are a few examples of the successful litigation efforts of Attorney General Moody's Consumer Protection Team:

- All USA Van Lines, Inc.: At trial, Attorney General Moody's office obtained more than $21.7 million in monetary relief and a permanent ban against the owner and affiliated businesses from operating moving-related services in Florida. To read the final judgment, click here.
- Finest Movers, Inc.: The Florida Attorney General's office obtained $80,000 in restitution to consumers and barred the defendant from providing artificially low quotes. To read the consent final judgement, click here.

- Ocean Moving & Storage Corp.: Attorney General Moody's office obtained $50,000 in restitution to consumers, $10,000 in civil penalties and barred the defendant from providing artificially low quotes. To read the consent final judgment, click here.
- Moving and Storage Accounting, Inc.: Attorney General Moody's office obtained two separate judgments in this case: a consent final judgment against Grace Metzger, Moving and Storage Accounting Inc. and Moving and Storage Accounting Services, ordering the corporate defendants to pay $300,000 in consumer restitution and $700,000 in penalties, including $120,000 in enhanced senior penalties, and approximately $274,000 in fees/costs; and a default final judgment requiring the defendants Maxx Socher, Moving Service Accounting and Storage, Inc. and Dr. Schlepper Inc. to pay $300,000 in consumer restitution and $700,000 in penalties, including $120,000 in enhanced senior penalties. Both judgments also barred the defendants from owning, operating or participating in moving services.
- U.S. Moving Services, Inc.: Attorney General Moody's office obtained $78,000 in restitution to consumers and barred defendants from providing artificially low quotes. To read the consent final judgment, click here.

Award recipients from Attorney General Moody's office include:

- Sasha Funk Granai, Deputy Director, Consumer Protection Division
- Ellen Lyons, Special Counsel, Consumer Protection Division
- Jennifer Pinder, Assistant Chief Assistant Attorney General, Tampa
- Carol DeGraffenreidt, Chief Assistant Attorney General, Jacksonville
- Nakia Gouldbourne, Financial Investigator
- Candace Martinez, Financial Investigator

Attorney General Moody sends congratulations to each award recipient and thanks each team member for stopping moving scams and helping build a Stronger, Safer Florida.

According to a U.S. Census Bureau report, Florida saw the second-highest growth of any state in the nation last year—making it a target-rich state for anyone trying to take advantage of people relocating.

Common signs of moving scams include:

- Hiring a Broker Instead of a Carrier: Many brokers advertise online and confuse consumers by appearing to be the actual moving company rather than a third-party broker. Often these brokers improperly require consumers to pay a deposit for a move before a moving company accepts the job and before the cost of the move is determined.
- Sight-Unseen Estimates: Know that if moving companies or brokers provide an estimate without ever looking at clients' personal items, the actual cost of the service may increase exorbitantly on moving day.
- Speedy Estimates: Be wary of someone providing an estimate without going through closets, cabinets and other storage areas—they may be trying to offer a lower quote and then hold items hostage until more money is paid before delivering.

- Demanded Deposits: Understand that full payment is generally completed upon delivery of items, not before. If a company is demanding full payment before the move, it may be a scam.
- Business Name Changes: Do thorough research on a company before hiring—including asking for legally required information, like the federally required information packet that must be provided to consumers. Sham companies may not provide this information and change business names regularly to avoid being known as a fraudulent business.
- Fees for Storage: Some companies offer door-to-door moving services while actually using multiple movers to transmit your property across the country. Sometimes storage fees may be charged *en route* if property must be put in storage along the way. Make sure to ask a moving company if it will personally be handling the move from pick-up to delivery.
- Other Unexpected Fees: Make sure to ask about any potential fees that may arise before agreeing to pay. Although not always a scam, fees may be added on to moving costs for a variety of reasons. Moving companies could charge extra fees for consumers who live on a second floor or above, did not provide boxes or moving materials, or for other unforeseen obstacles.
- Faulty or Unavailable Paperwork: Be sure to obtain all the proper paperwork and check for validity. If a company promises insurance, be sure to review the policies.

For helpful tips and red flags regarding moving scams, view Attorney General Moody's *Scams at a Glance: On the Move*.

Moving scams can be reported to the Florida Attorney General's Office by calling 1(866) 9NO-SCAM or filing a complaint online at MyFloridaLegal.com.