



CONSUMER ADVOCATE

A publication from the Consumer Protection Section of the Office of Ohio Attorney General Richard Cordray

BABY BOOMERS: ARE YOUR PARENTS BEING SCAMMED?

Although many baby boomers now are caring for their aging parents, they may not realize when their parents fall victim to scams.

According to a recent report by the nonprofit group Investor Protection Trust, about one-fifth of citizens over age 65 already have been victimized financially, whether through an inappropriate

investment, unfair fees or outright fraud.

One Southeast Ohio senior reported losing \$100,000 in five months through sweepstakes scams. He was informed by the scammers that he had “won” various prizes and was asked to send money via wire transfer to the Philippines and to Israel, which he did. The consumer had family members,

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COULD YOU BE A VICTIM OF MEDICAL IDENTITY THEFT?

Medical identity theft is on the rise and could put victims’ health at risk. This type of theft occurs when an imposter uses your personal information and/or insurance information to get medical treatment, prescription drugs or surgery.

The firm Javelin Strategy and Research reports that data theft cases related to medical records rose to 275,000 last year, double the number from 2008.

While medical identity theft can be financially damaging, it also can be life threatening. If an identity thief’s medical information is commingled with the victim’s medical information, the victim could be at risk for improper treatment.

According to the Federal Trade Commission, signs of medical identity theft include:

- You get a bill for medical services you did not receive.
- A debt collector contacts you about medical debt you don’t owe.
- You find medical collection notices you don’t recognize on your credit report.

- Your health insurance provider says you’ve reached your benefits limit after you try to make a legitimate claim.
- You are denied insurance because your medical records show a condition you do not have.

To protect yourself, pay close attention to your medical, insurance and financial records. Read the Explanation of Benefits (EOB) statement that your health care plan sends after treatment, and make sure the claims match the care received.

Request copies of your medical records and health insurance records. Ask your insurer for a report of all claims paid to your account. Make sure the information is accurate.

If you discover you are a victim of medical identity theft, file a police report and apply to the Attorney General’s Identity Theft Passport Program. Also report the theft to your physicians, providers and insurance company, and consider placing a fraud alert and a security freeze on your credit reports.

SHAM “VETERANS” GROUP

Since 2003, Ohioans have contributed nearly \$1.9 million to the U.S. Navy Veterans Association (USNVA), but mounting evidence indicates that the operation misrepresented its mission.

The organization collected money claiming it would help veterans, but little evidence shows how those contributions actually helped vets or their families.

On July 2, at the request of Attorney General Cordray, a judge in Franklin County issued temporary restraining orders to freeze the Ohio bank accounts of the USNVA and the accounts of those individuals alleged to be affiliated with the organization.

The man who appears to have orchestrated this sham charity made hundreds of thousands of dollars in political contributions to candidates throughout the United States and in Ohio.

On May 28, Cordray ordered the USNVA to stop contacting Ohio residents for contributions after determining that the group’s registration documents were plagued with irregularities. In June, he sought emergency court orders to prevent Ohioans’ contributions from being collected while the investigation continues.

Learn more about the case at www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov.

PARENTS BEING SCAMMED? *Continued from page 1*

but he lived alone and his family did not know he had sent the money.

In some cases, scammers are extremely aggressive. They may call a single victim several times per hour or even threaten victims with harm. When one elderly consumer told a scammer she was calling the police, he threatened to kill her and her family.

Despite the severity of these scams and the high rate of victimization, older adults may be reluctant to report scams or discuss them with their adult children. They may be embarrassed or worried about losing their independence.

On the other hand, adult children may not understand the risks and consequences of these scams. They may assume their parents would never fall victim to a financial scam, because they always had been financially savvy.

If you are caring for an aging parent, family member or friend, pay attention to warning signs, such as an increase in phone calls, stacks of sweepstakes offers and/or changes in behavior. Talk to your parents about sweepstakes scams and ask your parents' caregivers to notify you if they suspect anything suspicious.

File a complaint about a sweepstakes scam at www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov/ConsumerComplaint.

FILE A COMPLAINT

If you have a consumer problem that you can't solve on your own, file a complaint with Attorney General Richard Cordray's office. We'll do everything we can to help you resolve it.

In 2009, consumer complaints filed with the Attorney General's office reached a record high with more than 30,000 complaints.

Through the office's complaint resolution process and legal action, approximately \$7 million in consumer restitution, civil penalties, costs and other relief was generated in 2009.

File a complaint online at www.SpeakOutOhio.gov or by calling (800) 282-0515.

HELP FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Last July, Ohio Attorney General Richard Cordray launched a program to help small businesses and nonprofits recover dollars lost to deceptive business practices and scams. Since then, more than 1,250 small businesses and nonprofits have sought assistance, resulting in the recovery or savings of more than \$115,000.

"Many Ohio businesses have 20 or fewer employees and lack the resources to pursue disputes," Cordray said. "Our office provided the required effort and leverage to right the wrongs of unscrupulous business practices."

The program opened the Attorney General's consumer complaint process to include complaints from small businesses and nonprofits – the program has been available to individual consumers since the 1970s. Through the process, businesses reported complaints ranging from phony "yellow page" advertisements to unauthorized charges on their telephone bills.

In one case, a Mercer County physicians' office paid a sign company \$300 as a down-payment for a business sign but never received the product. The Attorney General's office facilitated a full refund.

Top complaints for the year include:

1. Phony "yellow page" advertisements
2. Unauthorized charges on telephone bills
3. Bogus Internet and website services
4. Extra fees from credit card payment processors
5. Unauthorized credit card charges
6. Failure to receive a service or product

Cordray encourages small businesses that experience unfair practices such as scams, deceptive advertising, shoddy workmanship, billing disputes, unauthorized charges, monopolies or boycotting by competitors, or any illegal conduct, to contact his office by calling (800) 282-0515 or by visiting www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov/Complaint.

WANT UPDATES?

- Receive the Consumer Advocate via e-mail by signing up at www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov/ConsumerAdvocate.
- Receive news and updates from the Ohio Attorney General's Office by signing up at www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov.
- Visit www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov for more information.