



STATE OF CONNECTICUT



GEORGE JEPSEN ATTORNEY GENERAL

RODERICK L. BREMBY COMMISSIONER

AG, DSS Caution Consumers About Postal Scam Involving Government Checks, Sweepstakes Prizes

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HARTFORD – Attorney General George Jepsen and state Department of Social Services Commissioner Roderick Bremby are cautioning consumers about a postal scam involving fraudulent sweepstakes award notifications accompanied by a bogus government check bearing the State of Connecticut seal and purporting to be from the Department of Social Services.

The Attorney General said his Office had received several complaints about the scam. Typically the award notification arrives in an envelope stamped in another state, or another country. The notification instructs the "winner" to deposit the fraudulent check into their bank account and immediately withdraw money to wire under the pretense that the wire transfer will cover administrative fees or taxes on the purported winnings. The "check" eventually bounces and the consumer is out the full amount, including the money wired to the scammers.

"While the check may look real, it is fraudulent and should not be deposited," said Attorney General Jepsen. "This scheme is the latest variation on the check overpayment and money-wiring scams that have plagued consumers in recent years."

The Department of Social Services referred a complaint from a Virginia woman to the Attorney General's Office earlier this week. The woman reported receiving an apparent check for \$2,260 from DSS, and was suspicious because she had no connection with the agency.

Commissioner Bremby said, "The people who have reported this fraudulent activity to the Attorney General's Office and DSS were certainly right to suspect something was amiss. However, others may not be as vigilant in protecting their finances, and it's important that word get out about the risk. We greatly appreciate the fast and thorough action by the Attorney General and his staff in this matter.

Jepsen's office is coordinating with state and federal law enforcement to address this issue. Meanwhile, the Attorney General offered the following tips for avoiding check overpayment scams:

- *Don't be fooled by a fraudulent check*, just because it looks legitimate;
- *Know who you're dealing with*- independently confirm the legitimacy of the issuer of the check and that the check was issued to you, and check for scam alerts online;
- *Know that Connecticut government agencies do not send out unsolicited checks* to consumers as a means to help pay for lotteries or other contests;

- *If you're selling something* over the Internet or through a newspaper ad, say "no" to a check for more than your selling price, no matter how tempting the plea or convincing the story;
- *If an offer sounds too good to be true*, especially a notification you've won a lottery that you've never entered, then it most likely is; and
- *Don't wire money back to anyone you don't know*. There is no legitimate reason for someone who is paying you, or giving you money, to send you a check and ask you to wire money back.

Consumers, who receive these mailings or are victims of the scam, should report it to: Attorney.General@ct.gov or to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) at www.ftc.gov/ftc/complaint.htm. Consumers may also file a complaint with the FTC by telephone (bilingual counselors are available to take complaints) by calling the toll-free number, 1-877- 382-4357.

The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft, and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

Assistant Attorney General Mercedes Alonzo, Consumer Protection, and Investigator Thomas Martin, Antitrust and Government Program Fraud, assisted the Attorney General with Assistant Attorneys General Michael Cole, chief of Antitrust and Government Program Fraud and Phillip Rosario, Consumer Protection department head.

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