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Kansas AG warns against charity scams in times of crisis

Before donating to a charity or nonprofit, do your homework.

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TOPEKA, Kan. (WIBW) - Attorney General Derek Schmidt is warning Kansans to be careful with their charitable giving as scams tend to arise in times of crisis.

Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt says everyone has been touched in some way by the events that have unfolded in recent weeks and the level of human suffering.

From Hurricane Ida to an earthquake in Haiti to the evacuation of thousands in Afghanistan and the struggles of veterans, the needs of those less fortunate are apparent. He said while we all would like to give generously to ease the pain, it is important to be cautious when calls for help come through the phone, email or text.

According to AG Schmidt, his office has seen too often the tricks that scammers and fraudsters use on generous Kansans, asking for contributions that are meant to go to those that have lost homes and belongings or are in need of food and medical supplies.

Recently, he said some Kansas attorneys helped to shoot down some scammers based in Michigan who alleged to fundraise in support of homeless veterans, children with autism, victims of house fires and breast cancer patients. The Kansas attorneys helped in getting the funds into the hands of the bonafide organizations that actually do that work.

AG Schmidt gave the following tips to help give to charities safely:

Support local and established charities. Schmidt said while many large international organizations do great work, donations can often have a greater impact when they support a cause close to your community, where the results of the donation can be seen.

Watch out for names that sound alike. Schmidt said scammers often make their organizations' names sound similar to other well-known charities.

Be careful with telemarketers requesting contributions. Schmidt said often the telemarketer keeps a large part of the donation. If questions about a solicitation arise, he said to not be afraid to reach out to the charity directly.

Ask questions to find where the donations go. Schmidt said to ask for written information, including how much of the money raised will actually be used for charitable purposes and how much will end up in the hands of the professional fundraiser.

Ask if your donation is tax-deductible. Schmidt said not all donations to charities are tax-deductible. Residents can check a charity's status with the IRS and when in doubt, should double-check with a tax preparer before assuming a donation will be tax-deductible.

Document your donation. Schmidt said to make the donation by credit card or check, not cash, wire transfer, or a gift card. He said a solicitor that asks for payment by wire transfer or gift card is a big red flag for scams.

If something does not feel right, he said to consider donating to a different cause. If you pay by check, he said to make sure the check is payable directly to the charitable organization, not to the fundraiser soliciting the donation.

Also, ask for a receipt to show the amount of the donation and if you specified your donation toward a specific project.

According to AG Schmidt, the safest way for Kansans to avoid charities fraud is to take control of their own charitable giving.

Rather than responding to solicitations for money that come through the mail, Kansans who wish to support charitable causes should develop their own proactive giving plan and give directly to the charities of their choice. Not only can this help avoid scammers, but he said it also eliminates the costs charged by professional fundraisers, instead of making sure that every penny goes to the charitable purpose rather than fundraising expenses.

In addition, he said giving to well-established local charities can maximize the benefits of each dollar and help avoid scams.

Schmidt said the **Kansas Charitable Organizations and Solicitations Act** requires most charitable organizations to register with the state before they solicit funds.

Examples of those exempt from registration include religious organizations, fraternal, patriotic, social, educational, alumni organizations and historical societies. Professional fundraisers and

solicitors working for a charitable organization are also required to register.

Consumers can call 785-296-3751 or visit the charity's [registration page](#) to check whether a charity is registered.

To visit Kansas' charity registry, click [HERE](#).

To check a charity's status with the IRS, click [HERE](#).

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