

TIPS ON CHARITABLE GIVING

New Yorkers give generously to charities. In fact, each year they give over \$10 billion to charitable organizations. Most charities are honest in their methods of soliciting contributions. However, there are some organizations that misuse fundraising methods, victimizing well-meaning people who only want to help a good cause.

The Attorney General's office regulates the conduct of charitable organizations and protects contributors from being victimized by unscrupulous fund raisers.

Fraudulent charitable solicitations have been the subject of many legal actions by the Attorney General's office. These actions compel deceptive fund raisers to follow the law or to stop doing business in New York. The Attorney General's office also tries to restore money that good-hearted New Yorkers give in the best of faith to charities.

For example, the Attorney General's office takes action against fraudulent fund raisers who solicit funds for charitable causes but use the money to line their own pockets. Actions by the Attorney General's office have resulted in the return of hundreds of thousands of dollars to the charitable purposes for which generous New Yorkers made contributions. Lawsuits by the Attorney General have forced illegitimate charities and their fund raisers to stop their

misleading practices and money they have collected has been distributed to charities throughout the State. Legitimate charities need contributions to continue their good works. Charities that use illegal fundraising practices should be ordered to stop those practices and return money they have received.

Considering a Charitable Contribution

Find out what the charity will do with your money -- ask for information about its programs and ask for a copy of its financial report. Find out how much of your money will be used for charitable programs.

Be wary if the organization will not provide information about its programs and finances upon request. Honest charities will be happy to give you the information requested. In New York, they are required by law to do so within 15 days.

Ask what proportion of money given actually goes to support the charity's program and what proportion goes to administrative costs.

Charities do have legitimate and necessary fundraising and administrative expenses, so beware of claims such as "all proceeds will go to charity." Be careful of charities with names that sound impressive or resemble those of other organizations -- some organizations use names similar to those of well known organizations in order to confuse donors.

Be wary of emotional appeals that talk about problems but do not explain how money raised will be spent or what the programs of the organization are.

Mail Solicitations

Read the literature carefully to make sure it identifies the charity and tells what will be done with your money. If it does not, call or write the charity to ask for program and financial information before making a contribution.

Some organizations send fundraising materials that look like actual bills. Others enclose very real looking copies of checks and request matching funds. Remember, you do not have to respond. Read the information carefully.

You do not have to pay for or return merchandise mailed to you if you did not order it.

Be careful of appeals asking you to return something such as a questionnaire or survey. Such devices may be used to divert your attention from the organization's program and how it will spend your donation.

Solicitations in Person

Ask the solicitor for identification. A door-to-door solicitor should have written identification authorizing that person to

solicit for the charity.

Inquire what the charity does with the money and if your contribution is tax deductible.

Request printed material describing the charity's program, how it uses its money, its address and phone number.

Solicitations Over the Phone

Don't fall for pressure tactics such as repeated phone calls or even threats. Remember you do not have to agree to donate at the time of the call or have someone pick up your contribution. You have the right to say no or to say you need more time.

Tickets and Merchandise Sales

Ask how much of the purchase price will go to the charity. If you are told that tickets will be given to an organization or individual, ask who will receive the tickets.

Giving to An Association of Police or Other Law Enforcement Group

Many people show their support of their local police by giving to police organizations. Unfortunately, con artists, taking advantage of the public's concern, make fraudulent solicitations.

When asked to give to a police organization, contact your local police or

other law enforcement agency to check on the identity and the legitimacy of the group asking for the contribution. Be wary of a solicitor who uses coercive or abusive tactics or who promises that your contribution will entitle you to better police protection or special privileges. This is illegal.

IF YOU DECIDE TO CONTRIBUTE -

DO NOT PAY IN CASH

Give your contribution by check made payable to the charity.

Complaints

If you wish to make a complaint about an organization that has solicited your contribution, contact the Attorney General's Charities Bureau or the Attorney General's office nearest you.

For More Information

New York law requires most charities soliciting contributions to register with the Attorney General and file annual financial reports. To find out if a charity is required to register and to get a copy of its financial report, call or write:

**New York State Attorney General
Charities Bureau - FOIL Section
120 Broadway
New York, NY 10271
(212) 416-8400**

For further information about a national charity, you may write to one of the "watchdog" agencies which monitor the activities of charities.

**Philanthropic Advisory Service Council
of Better Business Bureaus**
4200 Wilson Boulevard
Suite 800
Arlington, VA 22203-1804
1-800-575-GIVE
www.bbb.org

**New York Philanthropic Advisory
Service**
257 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10010
1-212-358-2873
www.newyork.bbb.org

ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICES:

The Capitol
Albany, NY 12224-0341

120 Broadway
New York, NY 10271-0332

44 Hawly Street
Binghamton, NY 14202

65 Court Street
Buffalo, NY 14202-3473

300 Motor Parkway
Hauppauge, NY 11788-5127

211 Station Road, 6th Floor
Mineola, NY 11501-3702

163 West 125th Street
New York, NY 10027-8201

70 Clinton Street
Plattsburgh, NY 12901-2818

235 Main Street
Poughkeepsie, NY 12601

144 Exchange Boulevard
Rochester, NY 14614-2176

615 Erie Boulevard West
Syracuse, NY 13204-2465

207 Genesee Street
Utica, NY 13501-2812

317 Washington Street
Watertown, NY 13601-3744

19 Court Street, Suite 200
White Plains, NY 10601-3310

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WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Attorney General Eliot Spitzer

**Attorney General's
Information & Complaint Line**

1-800-771-7755

www.oag.state.ny.us/charities/charities.html