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Secretary of State's Office Warns Marylanders to Beware of Charity Scams This Holiday Season

ANNAPOLIS, MD - As the holidays approach, Governor Larry Hogan and Secretary of State John Wobensmith are warning Maryland citizens to beware of deceptive practices. Charities in Maryland and beyond depend upon the generosity of citizens to provide programs and services to those in need across the state. While this is the time of year charities increase their efforts to collect donations, it is important to be vigilant about scams that are posing as legitimate charitable organizations.

"The holiday season inspires a spirit of generosity to help those in need, but unfortunately, scam artists are also stepping up their efforts to take advantage of that generosity," said Secretary Wobensmith. "It is important for all Marylanders to be vigilant and know exactly to which charities they are donating."

It is important to recognize the warning signs that may be affiliated with a scam. Ask questions and be wary of any charity that doesn't have answers.

Here are some "red flags" that should help determine if a charity is worthy of support:

- Did the organization refuse to send you written material or financial information?
- Did the solicitor offer to send a person to collect your contribution?
- Did the charity send you an invoice or statement that indicates a payment due for a contribution you never pledged?
- Does the organization's name and logo closely resemble another charity with a similar purpose?

Charitable organizations that solicit donations from Maryland citizens are required to be registered with the Office of the Secretary of State if they collect \$25,000 or more in direct public support or use paid solicitors to raise funds for the organization. Additionally, smaller charities may be required to file a simple fundraising notice with the Office of the Secretary of State.

To check if a charity is registered please call [1-800-825-4510](tel:1-800-825-4510). For more information on charities, please visit www.sos.state.md.us. Citizens can also go directly to the charities database <http://sos.maryland.gov/Charity/Pages/SearchCharity.aspx>.

The Secretary of State's Office is responsible for investigating charity fraud. To report a potentially fraudulent charity, please contact the Investigations Unit of the Secretary of State's Office at [410-260-3879](tel:410-260-3879) or [1-800-825-4510](tel:1-800-825-4510).

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