



NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Friday, March 20, 2020**

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U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE TAKES STEPS TO MAINTAIN MISSION AMIDST COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY

Anchorage, Alaska – U.S. Attorney Bryan Schroder announced a series of steps aimed at protecting consumer financial safety and preventing civil rights violations amidst the COVID-19 (the Coronavirus) outbreak.

“We are already seeing despicable fraudsters across the country trying use the COVID-19 virus to take advantage of their communities,” said U.S. Attorney Schroder. “Along with the FBI and all our law enforcement partners in Alaska, we will be diligent in finding and prosecuting these criminals.”

U.S. Attorney Schroder warned of several new fraud schemes seeking to exploit the evolving Coronavirus public health emergency, and urged the public to report suspected fraud schemes by calling the National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) hotline (1-866-720-5721) or to the NCDF e-mail address disaster@leo.gov.

This week, Attorney General Barr directed all U.S. Attorneys to prioritize the investigation and prosecution of Coronavirus-related fraud schemes. In a follow-up memorandum issued March 19, Deputy Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen further directed each U.S. Attorney to appoint a Coronavirus Fraud Coordinator to serve as the legal counsel for the federal judicial district on matters relating to the Coronavirus, direct the prosecution of Coronavirus-related crimes, and to conduct outreach and awareness.

Scammers have already devised numerous methods for defrauding people in connection with COVID-19. They are setting up websites, contacting people by phone and email, and posting disinformation on social media platforms. Some examples of scams linked to COVID-19 include:

- Individuals and businesses selling fake cures for COVID-19 online and engaging in other forms of fraud.
- Phishing emails from entities posing as the World Health Organization or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Malicious websites and apps that appear to share Coronavirus-related information to gain and lock access to your devices until payment is received.
- Seeking donations fraudulently for illegitimate or non-existent charitable organizations.
- Medical providers obtaining patient information for COVID-19 testing and then using that information to fraudulently bill for other tests and procedures.

The NCDF can receive and enter complaints into a centralized system that can be accessed by all U.S. Attorneys, as well as Justice Department litigating and law enforcement components to identify, investigate and prosecute fraud schemes. The NCDF coordinates complaints with 16 additional federal law enforcement agencies, as well as state Attorneys General and local authorities.

Jeffery Peterson, Special Agent in Charge of FBI's Anchorage Field Office, wants to assure the citizens of Alaska that the FBI remains steadfast in its mission to protect the American people and uphold the Constitution throughout this period of national emergency.

The FBI is reminding the American public to continue exercising smart cyber hygiene in this uncertain time. Be aware that cyber criminals may exploit concerns surrounding COVID-19 to perpetuate scams designed to steal your money. By remembering these four tips, you can protect yourself and help stop this criminal activity: (1) do not open attachments or click links within emails from senders you don't recognize; (2) always verify the information being shared originates from a legitimate source; (3) do not provide your logins, financial data or other personal information in response to an email; and (4) visit websites by manually inputting their domains to your browser. If you believe you are the victim of an internet scam or want to report suspicious activity, you can also visit the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center at www.ic3.gov.

The U.S. Attorney's Office has taken necessary precautions to protect the health and safety of its staff during this health emergency while continuing to fulfill its public safety mission. Essential law enforcement functions including investigations, the signing and execution of warrants, filing of charges, and case litigation will continue. District of Alaska prosecutors and support staff will continue working with federal, state, local and tribal law enforcement partners to safeguard our justice system and protect the safety and security of our nation during this difficult time.

To find more about Department of Justice resources and information, please visit www.justice.gov/coronavirus.

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