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RETAILERS URGED TO CHECK CHARITY REGISTRATIONS BEFORE PERMITTING SOLICITATIONS OF CUSTOMERS

For immediate release

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Attorney General George Jepsen, Consumer Protection Commissioner William Rubenstein and Veterans Affairs Commissioner, Dr. Linda Schwartz are advising retail stores to check registrations before allowing charitable organizations to solicit money from customers outside their stores.

The advisory was issued because of complaints received in the past few years about charities collecting money to benefit local veterans' organizations that never received the money.

"These scams not only hurt the donating public, but also hinder the efforts of legitimate charities, including those doing invaluable work for our country's military veterans," Commissioner Schwartz said.

Connecticut law requires organizations to register with the state Department of Consumer Protection prior to soliciting charitable contributions in the state.

"Registration helps to promote public confidence that the money being given is going to the purpose intended. Unregistered charities fly beneath the State's radar and can more easily misuse the charitable funds they collect," Attorney General Jepsen said. Ask the organization representative for a copy of the DCP registration, he said.

Commissioner Rubenstein said, "We strongly encourage generosity in assisting charities. However, in order to make donations as effective as possible, donors should learn as much as they can about a charity. The first step is to determine whether the charity is listed with the Department of Consumer Protection at www.ct.gov/dcp. If you find a charity is not listed, you may contact the Public Charities Unit at DCP or send an e-mail to ctcharityhelp@ct.gov, to report it."

"Secondly, although we are not authorized by law to rate the effectiveness of charities or limit the amount of funds that may be spent on the administrative costs of fundraising activities, there are several independent organizations, such as charitynavigator.org and guidestar.org, which provide that type of information to donors. These organizations are easily found on the Internet," he said.

Registration information can be found on DCP's website. Click on "verify a license," then "look up license" and at the prompt for "license type," select "charities" and enter all or part of the charity name. Click "search" and all registered active organizations are listed, including those that have claimed an exemption.

Attorney General Jepsen thanked the Connecticut Food Stores Association and the Connecticut Retail Merchants Association for distributing the advisory letter to their members.

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