

NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Liz Brocker
(701) 328-2213

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SURGE IN SWEEPSTAKES SCAMS

Robocalls Stealing Thousands from North Dakotans

BISMARCK, ND – Scam artists are profiting from unsuspecting elderly North Dakotans during this time of social distancing and social isolation, warned Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem.

The Consumer Protection Division of his office is seeing a noticeable increase of elderly victims who have lost money to sweepstakes scams. In each case, the victim received a robocall or live call claiming they had won a prize. Most of the calls claimed to be from Publisher's Clearing House. The victims were instructed to call back and provide the "unique prize code" included in the message. Once they did, the victims were given various reasons why they needed to send money before they could receive their so-called winnings.

"It is illegal to charge a fee of any kind in order for a person to collect a prize. Legitimate sweepstakes never collect any money before they give the winner the prize. That's one way to tell that these calls are all scams," said Stenehjem. "Our older citizens, many of whom live alone, have become even more isolated during the current pandemic, and that is making them an easy "mark" for scam artists," he continued.

An 88-year old victim mailed signed blank checks. He lost \$8,750. A 76-year old woman mailed cash, three times. She lost \$4,000. An 88-year old woman was instructed to buy Amazon gift cards and a 73-year old woman bought prepaid cash cards. In one case an 80-year old woman received personal checks to cash and use to pay the "fees." These checks were determined to be fake before the woman deposited them. Unfortunately, one 73-year old man lost a total of \$12,900. The scam artists used a variety of methods to get his money, including sending money orders, mailing cash, and even directing him to make deposits into designated bank accounts using bank-to-bank transfers.

All the recent victims lived alone.

"Social isolation is a boon for scam artists. If you have an elderly family member or neighbor, please warn them about these robocalls scams and remind them that no matter what they are told, they should never agree to send money in response to a call," said Stenehjem. "Before sending money on this scam, call our toll-free number and talk to us."

Information about these scams is available from the Attorney General's website at <https://attorneygeneral.nd.gov/consumer-resources/common-scams> or by calling the Consumer Protection Division at 800-472-2600.

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