

NEIL ABERCROMBIE
GOVERNOR



DAVID M. LOUIE
ATTORNEY GENERAL

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
425 QUEEN STREET
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813
(808) 586-1500

RUSSELL A. SUZUKI
FIRST DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL

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ATTORNEY GENERAL FILES LAWSUIT AGAINST “LOVE THE ANIMALS” SOLICITING CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTIONS VIA THE INTERNET

HONOLULU – After a five month investigation, on March 1, 2011, Attorney General David M. Louie filed a lawsuit in the Circuit Court, Third Circuit, against Anthony M. Marasia, dba “Love the Animals.” The lawsuit seeks injunctive relief, an accounting, restitution, civil penalties, and other equitable relief. Marasia resides in Honouliuli, Hawaii. The lawsuit alleges that:

- Marasia solicited contributions from donors via the Internet, including Facebook and other sites, seeking donations to care and provide for animals, and other humane purposes;
- Donors were led to believe that their donations were tax deductible;
- Love the Animals was not registered, as required by Hawaii’s charitable solicitation law, nor is it a tax exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code;
- All funds donated through the Internet were deposited into Marasia’s personal bank account; and
- Marasia cannot account for the expenditure of the funds for humane purposes

“Donors want to be sure their contributions benefit the causes they support, but unfortunately some false charities try to take advantage of consumers’ goodwill and generosity,” said Attorney General David M. Louie. “We encourage donors to make informed decisions about their charitable giving, and we will continue to vigorously enforce the laws that help protect them.”

The Attorney General provides the following guidance regarding charitable giving:

- Donate to charities with a track record and a history. Charities that spring up overnight may disappear just as quickly.
- If you have any doubt about whether you have made a pledge or a contribution, check your records. If you do not remember making the donation or pledge, resist the pressure to give.
- Investigate an organization before donating. Some phony charities use names, seals and logos that look or sound like those of respected, legitimate organizations.

- Call the office that regulates charitable organizations in your state (in Hawai'i, the Department of the Attorney General) to see whether the charity or fundraising organization is required to register in your state.
- Do not send or give cash donations. For security and tax record purposes, it is best to pay by check made payable to the charity.
- Ask for a receipt showing the amount of your contribution.
- Be wary of promises of guaranteed sweepstakes winnings in exchange for a contribution. You never have to give a donation to be eligible to win a sweepstakes.

Some of the sites where consumers can check out a charity include:

- Hawai'i charity registry: ag.ehawaii.gov/charity
- Hawai'i Attorney General's charity resources site: hawaii.gov/ag/charities
(View financial reports filed by professional solicitors who telemarket or send direct mail on behalf of charitable organizations.)
- American Institute of Philanthropy: www.charitywatch.org
- Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance: www.bbb.us/charity
- CharityNavigator: www.charitynavigator.org
- Federal Trade Commission: www.ftc.gov/charity/fraud
- Guidestar: www.guidestar.org

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For more information, contact:

Hugh R. Jones
Supervising Deputy Attorney General
(808) 586-1473
hugh.r.jones@Hawaii.gov
www.Hawaii.gov/ag/charities