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ALERT: SCAMMERS TAKING ADVANTAGE OF CORONAVIRUS FEARS

HONOLULU – Hawaii Attorney General Clare E. Connors and Hawaii Office of Consumer Protection Executive Director Stephen Levins are urging the Hawaii public to beware of, and report, scams and price gouging related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

“The public has to be extra cautious of those who would take advantage of our community in a crisis situation,” said AG Connors. “We advise everyone to be vigilant, especially as we all work to ensure that everyone has access to necessities.”

Hawaii consumers should be vigilant as scammers attempt to take advantage of the public’s fear of the health situation by setting up charity scam websites, offering bogus medical treatment claiming to cure or prevent COVID-19, and disseminating misinformation about the disease through social media, text messages, and emails.

- Watch for fraudulent emails claiming to be from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or experts saying they have information about the virus. Verify information through trusted government websites such as www.ftc.gov, www.cdc.gov, health.hawaii.gov, www.who.int, etc.
- Do not click on links from sources you do not know as doing so may lead to computer viruses or phishing attempts.

- Ignore offers of goods or services for COVID-19. There currently are no vaccines, pills, potions, lotions, lozenges or other prescription or over-the-counter products available to treat or cure COVID-19. Scammers may still offer fake vaccines and other bogus medical products claiming to offer “cures” for the virus. They may also offer “get rich quick” investment schemes for unproven virus treatments.
- Beware of fundraising solicitations and do not rush into making donations whether through charities or crowdfunding sites. You should never feel rushed or pressured to donate, and never make donations in cash, by gift card, or by money wire. Be sure to do your due diligence to verify the charity’s legitimacy.

Price gouging refers to sellers trying to take unfair advantage of consumers during an emergency or disaster by greatly increasing prices for essential consumer goods and services.

“Price gouging will not be tolerated in the State of Hawaii,” said Stephen Levins. “All reports of price gouging are being fully investigated and anyone found to have engaged in the practice will be prosecuted. We’re all in this together and no one should be taking advantage of our community during these challenging times.”

Even though the Office of Consumer Protection does not represent individuals, it may, on behalf of the public, investigate or prosecute someone who has engaged in price gouging. Anyone who believes that they have been the victim of price gouging, or who has information regarding potential price gouging, is encouraged to immediately file a complaint with the OCP by calling (808) 587-4272 or online at <https://cca.hawaii.gov/ocp/consumer-complaint/>.

Finally, the public is urged not to hoard materials and supplies. Much of the hoarding is being driven by false rumors. Please shop for your weekly needs and leave items for other who need to do the same.

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