

September, 2011

## **Tips for Avoiding Elder Financial Fraud**

In the wake of the Bernie Madoff scandal and in these troubling economic times, everyone is more concerned about keeping themselves and their finances safe and secure. Seniors are especially susceptible to fraud and abuse, as they often own their own home, have a strong credit history, or some other financial holding that makes them attractive to criminals. Federal and Ohio fraud statistics show that of Ohio internet fraud in 2010, more than one-third of that targeted those over the age of fifty. This group also lost the most on average to frauds of any group in the statistics.

With this in mind, here a few tips to keep yourself and your finances safe:

- **Always carefully review documents you sign.** Never sign forms without understanding what kind of coverage or consent you may be giving someone. If you have concerns about the form, stop and ask. Never feel pressured into signing something right away or losing an offer instantly, as this is usually a sure sign of some kind of scam or fraud waiting to happen. The same is true of telemarketing: if they won't give you the offer in writing, you shouldn't do business with this company or individual.

- **Be well-informed and cautious.** Just as you would for anything else, shop around and do your research. Items like health insurance, funerals, prescription drugs, and other products or services are part of a competitive marketplace. Shop around for different products, and get input from your friends and family before making a decision. Do your research, and be wary if things sound too good to be true. Investigating companies and products thoroughly before making a purchase or signing a contract can save you time, money, and headaches in the future.

- **Keep good records.** Keeping track of appointments and communications can go a long way in protecting yourself against fraud as well. Many schemes involve false names and addresses for companies, or forging your doctor's approval for equipment or other treatments. Make sure you have everything in writing, so you can carefully review it, and make sure it matches what your records show for any communications from your doctor. If there's a difference, check with your doctor before committing to any contract. Similarly, if there is a concern over a financial arrangement, ask whoever handles your finances to make sure that this matches any previous agreement. Keep a copy of everything you sign to protect yourself from fraud.

If you suspect you are a victim of fraud, contact the police. The Parma Law Department recently created a flyer detailing current scams in and around Parma that are directly affecting the elderly. This flyer is available from either the Parma Law Department or from the Office on Aging (formerly the Parma Senior Center).

More tips on avoiding elder financial abuse:

Federal Bureau of Investigation – Fraud Target: Senior Citizens: <http://www.fbi.gov/scams-safety/fraud/seniors>

Ohio Attorney General – Elder Fraud:

<http://ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Services/Seniors/Elder-Fraud>

(Tim Dobeck is the elected Law Director and Chief Prosecutor of the City of Parma. He is also a partner with the law firm of Boyko, Dobeck & Weaver.)

November, 2012

## **How to Avoid Health Care and Insurance Fraud**

According to the FBI, "Health care fraud costs the country an estimated \$80 billion a year." Health care fraud has also become an increased threat with \$2.7 trillion being spent on health care nationally. While federal health care reform has been praised for its benefits, there are those who will take advantage of the law to scam people out of money, especially the elderly. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has already warned individuals of this issue when federal health care reform first passed in 2010. Among the concerns of HHS were 1-800 numbers and door-to-door "salesmen" trying to pass off insurance policies that were phony. Others have used the new health care reform offering health care plans during a "limited enrollment" period as part of the new law that do not really exist. Because of fraud concerns, President Obama has recently started a unique joint fraud prevention program between the federal government and private health insurers hoping to help eliminate medical insurance fraud.

There are a number of ways you can avoid becoming a victim of health care or health insurance fraud. It is important to keep in mind the following when considering the purchase of health care services and/or health insurance:

- Never sign blank insurance claim forms.
- Never give blanket authorization to a medical provider to bill for services rendered.
- Ask your medical providers what they will charge and what you will be expected to pay out-of-pocket.
- Carefully review your insurer's explanation of the benefits statement. Call your insurer and provider if you have questions.
- Do not do business with door-to-door or telephone salespeople who tell you that services of medical equipment are free.
- Give your insurance/Medicare identification only to those who have provided you with medical services.
- Keep accurate records of all health care appointments.
- Know if your physician ordered equipment for you.

Knowing how to protect yourself in safely obtaining medical care and medical insurance is key to preventing fraud. If you discover that you have been the victim of medical care or medical insurance fraud in the State of Ohio, do not hesitate to contact the Ohio Department of Insurance Fraud Unit at (614) 644-2671 or (800) 686-1527. The Fraud Unit may also be reached via e-mail at [ODI.Fraud@insurance.ohio.gov](mailto:ODI.Fraud@insurance.ohio.gov). The Fraud Unit only investigates claims against providers. If your complaint involves an insurance company, contact the Ohio Department of Insurance Consumer Service Division. An online complaint can be filed against an insurance company at <https://secured.insurance.ohio.gov/Consumers/CnsComplaint/ComplaintOnline.aspx>. A complaint may be filed against an insurance agent at the Ohio Department of Insurance Enforcement Unit that may be reached at (614) 644-2560 or 800-686-1527. The Enforcement Unit may also be reached by e-mail at

ODI.Enforcement@insurance.ohio.gov. Reporting medical insurance fraud benefits all residents in the State of Ohio and the City of Parma by creating safer health care options.

*(Tim Dobeck is the elected Law Director and Chief Prosecutor for the City of Parma. He is also a partner with the law firm of Boyko, Dobeck & Weaver.)*

August, 2013

## **BE AWARE OF TELEMARKING SCAMS**

Recently telemarketers have been contacting Parma residents stating the emergency alert telephone system they had ordered was ready to be delivered, when the system was neither purchased nor desired by the resident. The Attorney General's office described the calls as "this week's scam," noting that every week it's something different. Telemarketing Fraud costs victims more than \$40 billion a year, with anywhere from 56 to 80 percent of these calls being directed towards senior citizens. Scam artists target seniors because they may live alone, may have more free time to talk, may be less likely to hang up the phone because they don't want to be rude, or may be more trusting. This article will inform the reader of the requirements of a telemarketer when they call you, outline typical telemarketing scams, and explain the process of reporting a telemarketing scam.

### **Telemarketer Requirements**

Within the first sixty seconds of a telephone call, and before requesting any financial information a telephone solicitor must:

- 1) State the salesperson's true name.
- 2) State the company's full name.
- 3) State that the purpose of the call is to affect a sale.
- 4) Identify the goods or services being sold.

To view a list of telephone solicitors who are properly registered with Attorney General Mike DeWine visit: <http://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Individuals-and-Families/Consumers/Telephone-Solicitors>

### **Typical Scams**

*Prizes and Sweepstakes.* These frauds generally involve informing the victim that he or she could win, or has already won a valuable prize or a sum of money. They tell the victim they are required to send in money to cover taxes or shipping and handling, or to provide a credit card number as a condition of receiving the prize. The prize is often never delivered or, if so, is costume jewelry or some cheap electronic equipment worth far less than the money paid. Remember that sweepstakes are free, and that buying merchandise will not improve your chances of winning. Do not give in to high-pressure sales tactics.

*Health, Funeral, and Life Insurance.* Many seniors are concerned about having the funds to pay for needed medical care or a proper burial. Salespeople take advantage of these concerns by selling the elderly policies that duplicate existing coverage, or do not provide the coverage promised. Be skeptical of these offers and always ask for paperwork on the policy before affecting a sale.

*Other.* Many telemarketers will pretend to be in a position of authority and concoct a story to persuade the victim to hand over cash. These scams include home improvement scams, where contractors claim your home needs expensive repair for damage you had not noticed, reverse mortgage scams, where seniors are offered free homes or investment opportunities, and travel package scams that do not provide the promised services.

**How to Respond**

Never call-back the number on your caller I.D. of a telephone solicitor. This will put your number in their system which will result in more telephone scams directed towards your number. Instead, report the scam to the Attorney General Mike DeWine by filling out a form at <http://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Individuals-and-Families/Consumers/File-A-Complaint.aspx> . For a more immediate response, call and report the scam to the attorney general Monday through Friday, between 8am and 7pm, toll-free at 800-282-0515.

*Final Tips:* Never disclose your credit card, bank account, or Social Security numbers to someone who contacts you by telephone. Ask detailed questions about the offered product, the total price, delivery date, cancellation policy, and ask the caller to send you more information through the mail before you make a decision. A telemarketer who is unwilling to provide these specifics should be handled with extreme caution. Remember, they called you, take your time, and don't be afraid to say no or hang up.

May 20, 2015

## **NATIONAL CRAIGSLIST SCAM HITS PARMA**

City of Parma Law Director Tim Dobeck has been notified of a Craigslist scam that occurred in the City of Parma that places potential renters of residential property at risk.

A resident of Parma, who is the executor of his deceased parents' estate, put their residence up for sale with a national real estate company.

Apparently, sometime later, an individual with an Austin, Texas area code posted a listing on Craigslist soliciting the property for rent. As a result of that listing, several people have asked the sellers whether the home is for sale or for rent. They also indicated that they had seen three identical listings for the house on the Multiple Listing Service and Craigslist, except for the fact that the Craigslist ad indicated that the house was for rent.

City of Parma Police Department Lieutenant Kevin Riley stated that this scam is a national problem. The scammers copy the legitimate listing and re-post it to a Craigslist ad saying that the property is for rent. Then, if they get someone to respond, they accept a security deposit or first month's rent, even though they have no legitimate interest in the property and in fact may never have ever been in the state of Ohio.

Law Director Dobeck is very concerned that this scam has reached our city and stated, "Everyone must be diligent in their financial affairs, especially when sending money out of state to a party they do not know." He also advised that if any one suspects a scam of this nature, they should call the Parma Police at 440-885-1234.

May, 2015

## **Phone Scams**

The Law Department would like to encourage seniors to be wary of scam artists attempting to get money by posing as IRS agents over the telephone. This aggressive type of telephone scam is being reported more frequently every tax filing season, and this season is no different. And of course, phone scams are not limited to the tax season, so everyone needs to know how to protect themselves throughout the year.

The IRS recently released an annual statement regarding this particular type of telephone scam and listed ways to recognize a scam artist. The IRS has stated that it will never call to demand immediate payment or demand payment by a specific payment method such as a prepaid debit card. The IRS will also never ask for information regarding personal credit cards and debit cards or threaten to have a taxpayer arrested by local police for refusing immediate payment. These are clear indications of a scam.

Other characteristics of this particular scam include:

- fake names and fake IRS badge numbers;
- scammers able to recite the last four digits of a victim's Social Security number;
- threats of arrest;
- threats of having a driver's license revoked;
- asking for payment via a prepaid card; and
- claims that owed money must be paid immediately.

If someone calls you claiming to be from the IRS, the IRS encourages you to do the following:

- If you know you owe taxes or you think you might owe taxes, call the IRS at 1-800-829-1040. The IRS employees at that line can help you with a payment issue, if there really is such an issue.
- If you don't owe taxes or have no reason to think that you owe taxes, then call and report the incident to the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration at 1-800-366-4484 or at [TIGTA.gov](http://TIGTA.gov).
- You can also file a complaint using the [FTC Complaint Assistant](http://FTC.gov) on [FTC.gov](http://FTC.gov).

The Parma Law Department also asks residents to please call and report any incidents to the Parma Police Department at 440-887-7300.

Finally, it is also important to realize that phone scams and solicitations exist in forms too numerous to list here, and a lot of these scams are specifically targeting senior citizens. While telephone scams such as this are of particular prevalence, senior citizens must also keep wary of suspicious solicitations and requests in their mail and email including "sweepstakes" and "debt relief" offers. The best protection from all these scams is the ability to recognize them, which can often be difficult. If a phone call, an email, or a letter seem suspicious, it is important that you do not give away private information regarding finances, credit cards, or debit cards. If you would like more information regarding tax scams, visit the IRS's website at [IRS.gov](http://IRS.gov).

June, 2015

## **Avoiding Landscaping and Lawn Services Scams**

As spring turns to summer many Parma residents will head outdoors to enjoy the warmer weather and all the wonderful parks and recreation that our area offers. For those who have green spaces around their homes, it is once again time to turn our attention to lawn care and landscaping. Before you employ yard and lawn service companies though, it is important to be aware of some requirements and good practices so that you do not fall victim to unscrupulous businesses or fraudsters. You can drastically reduce the possibility of falling prey to a scammer by doing a little homework before you sign on with a lawn service company.

### **Typical Scams**

*The All-Cash Deal.* Most lawn service scams will want you to pay for the summer up front in cash. This allows them to simply take your money and never do any work, or to do substandard work and not be accountable to you. Most lawn service companies will allow you to be billed for services monthly or to be billed after each service or treatment is completed. While it may be more convenient to pay up front, this can put you at risk of being unsatisfied with the condition of your lawn. Many established companies also accept checks or credit/debit cards. It's always a good idea to get receipts or have a way to track payments and prove that you have paid a bill or outstanding balance.

*The No Show.* Some lawn care services may approach you about forming an agreement for the entire summer if you're willing to pay up front. The problem here is that after you have paid, you have limited options to keep the company honest if they don't stay committed to the agreed upon schedule, or fail to show up at all. It's important to always get a business card or phone number so that you can contact the company if you have a concern about the services you are receiving.

*The Sub-standard Product.* It's important to establish what your expectations are with a lawn care service and to provide guidance relating to your preferences and any hazards on your property. It is in the best interest of a lawn service company to perform up to your expectations so that they can keep you as a customer. If you make clear what your expectations are up front, you are much less likely to be frustrated by sub-standard or haphazard work, and you will be able to voice your concerns with the company based upon what was previously agreed to.

### **How to Protect Yourself**

Call the City of Parma. The first thing to know before engaging a lawn service company is that all lawn service and landscaping companies who operate within Parma are required to register with the City under City Ordinance 1507.17. These licenses must be renewed on an annual basis and are on record with the Building and Engineering Department. Before signing a contract with a lawn service company, ask if they are registered with the City and consider calling the Building and Engineering Department at 440-885-8030 to ensure that their license is current.



Do some research. A second tip is to make use of the recent explosion of online review services. Many lawn care providers have customer reviews and testimonials on their websites, and many more are reviewed on free services such as Yelp and Google. These reviews can provide useful information regarding how other customers view the quality of the company's work, and whether their prices are fair. As always, it is also a good idea to check with the Better Business Bureau online at [www.BBB.org](http://www.BBB.org) to see if lawn services are accredited by the Better Business Bureau and if there are any outstanding or unresolved complaints against the company. You can also ask your friends and neighbors about their experiences with lawn service companies.

Get it in writing. A third tip is to consider signing a written contract. If you are contemplating an ongoing relationship with a lawn service company, it may be advisable to get everything in writing. Having a contract will allow you and the company to discuss exactly what services are expected to be provided and how much you will be expected to pay. If a disagreement arises at a later time, you will have that contract to refer back to so you both know exactly what was agreed to.

Know who you're dealing with. You may be approached by individuals driving vehicles without any kind of graphics or branding offering lawn care services if you pay cash up front. This scenario should be full of red flags for the diligent observer. Most established lawn care companies advertise their businesses with applied graphics or painted logos on their vehicles. Such a logo combined with a phone number should let you know that you're dealing with an honest business.

### **What to do if you are Scammed**

If you do find yourself in the unfortunate position of being scammed by a dishonest lawn service provider, report the scam to the attorney general Mike DeWine by filling out a form at <http://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/individuals-and-families/consumers/file-a-complaint.aspx> . You may also call the attorney general's office to file a report Monday through Friday, between 8am and 7pm, toll-free at 800-282-0515. You should also contact the Parma Police Department and file a police report. Finally, if you encounter a lawn service provider who is not registered with the City or who does not have a current license, please report the business to Building and Engineering Department, which can be reached at 440-885-8030 Monday through Friday, between 8:30am and 4:30pm.

*Timothy G. Dobeck is the elected Law Director and Chief Prosecutor for the City of Parma. He is also a partner at the law firm of Boyko & Dobeck in Seven Hills.*

August, 2015

## **Elder Financial Abuse**

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is recognized every June 15, and as such, the Parma Law Department would like to shed light on the risk of financial abuse facing senior citizens. Unfortunately, financial abuse of elders has become a growing problem in this nation. And while it is a horribly ugly problem facing senior citizens, it is even more horrendous when the perpetrator is a family member as is too often the case. But there are ways for individuals to protect themselves.

There are some common scenarios in which a senior citizen may find themselves being taken advantage of. As prior Senior Center Articles indicate, a popular form of elder abuse involves scam artists tricking individuals into giving out money and financial information over the phone or through the mail. False promises of prize money, awards, and gifts convinces victims into paying a “small fee” or supplying the scammer with private financial information. But scam artists also prey on victims in other ways. Reports of fake repairmen and salesmen are not unheard of, and everyone should be wary of anyone asking for money in return for unsolicited services. However, the most unnerving scenarios of elder financial abuse are those in which a family member or trusted friend is the perpetrator! According to the National Center on Elder Abuse, the vast majority of financial elder abuse is perpetrated by family.

There are signs that an elder is the victim of financial abuse and it is important for senior citizens and their loved ones to keep an eye on certain things even if it means keeping an eye on other family member’s actions and motives. If an elder is suddenly facing a change in finances, it may be a sign of foul play. The same can be said about sudden changes regarding estate planning and power of attorney. New names on financial accounts may also be a red flag indicating potential abuse. And if an elder is making suspicious purchases or is found to be sending in money to a “sweepstakes,” you should take action immediately to prevent abuse or further abuse.

Of course there are things you can do to protect yourself and others from becoming victims of financial abuse. Below are some tips for senior citizens and their trusted loved ones:

- Watch your finances! Suspicious activity on credit cards and accounts should not be ignored! Having someone else know your finances can help, but make sure that person is trustworthy. A trusted loved one or an attorney is recommended.
- If need be, add the name of a trusted loved one to your financial accounts.
- Keep an eye on the mail! Beware of scam artists advertising fake sweepstakes!
- Add your phone number to the “do not call” list at [donotcall.gov](http://donotcall.gov) or call (888)382-1222.
- If attempted or suspected abuse becomes out of your control, contact the Cuyahoga County Adult Protective Services for further aid. Their 24 hour hotline number is (216)420-6700 and more information is available at <http://dsas.cuyahogacounty.us/en-US/adult-protective-services.aspx>.
- If an elder is not competent to protect him/herself, then guardianship may be granted through the courts.
- More information is available through the National Center on Elder Abuse. (<http://www.ncea.aoa.gov/index.aspx>) (1-855-500-3537).

August, 2015

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*Health, Funeral, and Life Insurance.* Many seniors are concerned about having the funds to pay for needed medical care or a proper burial. Salespeople take advantage of these concerns by selling the elderly policies that duplicate existing coverage, or do not provide the coverage promised. Be skeptical of these offers and always ask for paperwork on the policy before affecting a sale.

*Other.* Many telemarketers will pretend to be in a position of authority and concoct a story to persuade the victim to hand over cash. These scams include home improvement scams, where contractors claim your home needs expensive repair for damage you had not noticed, reverse mortgage scams, where seniors are offered free homes or investment opportunities, and travel package scams that do not provide the promised services.

**How to Respond**

Never call-back the number on your caller I.D. of a telephone solicitor. This will put your number in their system which will result in more telephone scams directed towards your number. Instead, report the scam to the Attorney General Mike DeWine by filling out a form at [http://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Individuals-and-Families/Consumers/File-A-](http://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Individuals-and-Families/Consumers/File-A-Complaint.aspx)

[Complaint.aspx](http://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Individuals-and-Families/Consumers/File-A-Complaint.aspx) . For a more immediate response, call and report the scam to the attorney general Monday through Friday, between 8am and 7pm, toll-free at 800-282-0515.

*Final Tips:* Never disclose your credit card, bank account, or Social Security numbers to someone who contacts you by telephone. Ask detailed questions about the offered product, the total price, delivery date, cancellation policy, and ask the caller to send you more information through the mail before you make a decision. A telemarketer who is unwilling to provide these specifics should be handled with extreme caution. Remember, they called you, take your time, and don't be afraid to say no or hang up.

November, 2015

## **BEWARE OF SNOW PLOWING SCAMS**

As we gear up for another blistering winter in Northeast Ohio, many Parma seniors may be thinking of weather-proofing their homes, stocking their cars with ice scrapers, or even hiring companies to plow their driveways and sidewalks. While it is good to be proactive about winter preparations, it is also important to be wary of potential scams and traps that Parma seniors have fallen victim to in the past.

Last winter, in particular, one couple was solicited by a company for snow plowing services. The couple wrote a check for \$250 to the company, with the understanding that the company would plow their driveway and sidewalks for the whole winter, only to have a subcontractor plow their property once or twice throughout the entire winter. While the couple believed they were getting a deal by paying up-front for the service, they were taken advantage of and left with few options of recourse.

It is important to be aware of potential scams that could exist and take measures to protect yourself. If you feel that a potential arrangement could be a scam or rip-off, call the City of Parma. Service companies operating within Parma are required to register with the City under the Parma Codified Ordinance 1507.17. The registered licenses must be renewed on an annual basis and are on record with the Building and Engineering Department. Before entering into a service agreement, ask if the company is registered with the City and consider calling the Building and Engineering Department at 440-885-8020 to make certain that their license is valid and up-to-date.

It is also important to do your own research on the company. You should have the entire agreement put in writing, spelling out all of the terms, conditions, and costs of the arrangement. And you should also make sure you get contact names and numbers of each person with which you make the agreement.

If you do find yourself in the unfortunate position of being scammed by a dishonest company, report the scam to the attorney general Mike DeWine by filling out a form at <http://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/individuals-and-families/consumers/file-a-complaint.aspx> or you may call the attorney general's office to file a report at 1-800-282-0515. Additionally, if you come across a business that is not registered with the City or in possession of a current license, please report the business to the Building and Engineering Department.

*(Timothy G. Dobeck is the elected Law Director and Chief Prosecutor for the City of Parma. He is also a partner at the law firm of Boyko & Dobeck in Seven Hills.)*

December, 2015

## **Avoiding Investment Fraud and Scams**

Many senior citizens have worked hard and saved over their lives to build up a nice nest egg for retirement, their children or grandchildren, or for medical expenses. Unfortunately, there are individuals out there who want to take advantage of your hard work for their own benefit. This article will go over a few of the more common financial scams that may be directed toward senior citizens.

### **Typical Scams**

*Credit Repair Scams.* Since the financial crisis of 2008, there have been a number of financial counseling companies that have come into existence. Some dishonest individuals may be taking advantage of this trend for their own nefarious purposes. Those hoping to victimize you may make claims that sound too good to be true. Be aware that only incorrect information may be removed from your credit report and these companies cannot remove accurate negative information, such as a bankruptcy or lien. The good news is that most negative comments on your credit report will be removed automatically after seven years. If you want to improve your credit report or consolidate outstanding debt, consider contacting credit reporting agencies or lending institutions on your own. If you are uncomfortable doing this on your own, consider asking a trusted advisor such as a family member or close friend to assist you with the call or to attend a meeting with you.

*Fake Check or Payment Scams.* Those who are familiar with the internet and email will likely have heard of some variation of this scam. The potential fraudster will often present themselves as a foreign citizen or businessperson who needs to transfer money out of their home country and will pay you a nice fee for your assistance. Fraudsters could also just be strangers presenting a similar story. These scams almost always will present you with a fake or forged check that needs to be cashed, or will ask you to send money with the promise of getting your reward later. The check will bounce and the money will be deducted from your account or you will never receive the promised reward. Always remember that it is a bad idea to send money to a person that you do not know.

*Living Trusts.* Trusts are commonly used legal instruments that may be used to keep assets from going through probate court and to receive favorable tax treatment. Trusts can be a very useful estate planning tool to provide for your relatives and friends, however they also can be used by fraudsters to take advantage of you. Be wary of individuals who peddle these instruments door to door or over the phone. Also be wary of salespersons who make promises that sound too good to be true. Those who hope to take advantage of you have a motivation to promise outsized gains and benefits that they can't really deliver. Always consider all of your estate planning options and consult trusted advisors like a family member or a financial advisor that you have done business with previously. Also consider consulting an attorney before you sign any contracts or agreements. Many organizations offer free or reduced-priced legal services to senior citizens who may be unable to afford traditional legal services.

*Annuities.* Annuities are common investment products for seniors and others seeking fixed income investments to provide monthly income during retirement. Annuities are typically sold by

insurance companies and other financial services companies. To buy an annuity, you will pay a sum of money that will then be paid back to you over a period of time, typically with interest. It is important to fully understand what you are buying when you considering purchasing an annuity. Be wary of high-pressure sales people or individuals and companies that seem to promise too much. Annuities are not a way to make handsome profits and get rich. Those who promise guaranteed high interest rates usually aren't giving you the full picture. As always, consult an attorney, trusted advisor, or financial advisor prior to signing a contract or making an investment.

### **General Tips**

If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Always be wary of individuals who promise investments returning high guaranteed rates of return. The financial markets fluctuate regularly and even the best financial professionals cannot always beat the market. If someone promises guaranteed large gains, they may be trying to take advantage of you.

Understand what you're buying. Always ask questions and make sure that you fully understand what you're buying. Those who use high-pressure sales tactics and financial jargon usually don't have your best interest in mind. A good financial advisor will make sure to address all your concerns and questions before asking you to buy an investment product or sign a contract.

Ask for help. Never be afraid to ask for help from a trusted advisor. Trusted advisors can be family members, attorneys, or other people that you have relationships with. It is always a good idea to get a second opinion when it comes to investments and financial products. It never hurts to be cautious when it comes to your money.

### **What to do if you are Scammed**

If you do find yourself in the unfortunate position of being scammed, please file a report with the attorney general, Mike DeWine, by filling out a form at <http://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/individuals-and-families/consumers/file-a-complaint.aspx> . You may also call the attorney general's office to file a report Monday through Friday, between 8am and 7pm, toll-free at 800-282-0515.

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