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Protecting Seniors

Prosecutor Walsh Declares September as Senior Safety Awareness Month

AKRON, Ohio (Wednesday, September 2, 2020) – As part of her ongoing mission to protect our community, Prosecutor Sherri Bevan Walsh has declared September as Senior Safety Awareness Month. Since 2002, Prosecutor Walsh has set September as a month to focus even more attention on protecting Summit County seniors.

“Keeping Summit County safe has been a top priority for me. Protecting those who are most vulnerable is vital to that mission. That is why each year I declare September as Senior Safety Awareness month,” said Prosecutor Walsh. “This year is especially important to make sure our seniors are safe. According to the CDC, seniors are at a higher risk for severe illness from the COVID-19 virus. Scammers and thieves are now targeting older members of our population, using the Coronavirus pandemic as a way to steal money from seniors.”

Prosecutor Walsh added, “This year has been difficult for everyone. Because of the limit on the number of people who can gather at one location, my office is working hard to provide safety information to the community. I have already conducted several ZOOM safety speeches as well as sending out email alerts and social media notifications.”

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Seniors also face specific threats and scams. According to the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), older people are quicker to believe promises and may not take action when they've been scammed.

Seniors many times are reluctant to report they are a victim of a scam. They're concerned about being embarrassed or having a family member or friend think they can't live on their own. We are here to say we can help.

"Report Elder Abuse - Your Reaction Makes A Difference" is our public awareness campaign on billboards placed around Summit County. The billboards will have contact information for people if they suspect a senior they know is a victim.

Throughout the entire month of September, the Summit County Prosecutor's Office will be educating as many senior citizens as possible about scams, criminal activity, and how to protect their home.

The COVID-19 pandemic has really taken a toll on a lot of people. Lives have been flipped upside down with many people not leaving their home over fears of getting the virus. Others have lost their jobs or had their hours cut back.

People are also on their computers more, working from home. That is an opportunity for criminals to strike, as they prey on our emotions, hoping the feeling of being overwhelmed clouds our judgement.

Here are some tips to remember so you do not become a victim of a COVID-19 scam:

- Don't respond to texts, emails or calls about checks from the government. They are more than likely fake.
- Ignore offers for vaccinations and home test kits. Scammers are selling products to treat or prevent COVID-19 without proof that they work.
- Be wary of ads for COVID-19 test kits. Most test kits being advertised have not been approved by the FDA, and aren't necessarily accurate.
- Don't answer unknown phone numbers. Scammers are using illegal robocalls to pitch everything from low-priced health insurance to work-at-home schemes.
- Scammers are sending fake emails from well-known companies, such as Amazon, hoping to get you to click on the link and provide your personal information. Don't click on links from unsolicited emails.

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Scammers and thieves target seniors in other ways. The more seniors and their families know, the better prepared they are to not become a victim.

- Be aware of scams targeting the elderly. One is called the “Grandparent Scam”. This is when a person receives a call from someone claiming to be their grandchild. The caller says they’re in trouble – either they were arrested or in a car crash – and need cash quick. They will usually ask to have the money sent by purchasing gift cards. The caller also asks to not tell “mom and dad”.
- Another scam is the IRS Scam. In this scam, a caller claims the person owes taxes and will be arrested if they don’t pay immediately. Again, the caller will ask to make the payment by purchasing gift cards. The IRS never calls to demand an immediate payment.
- Scammers also target the elderly with something called the Jury Duty Scam. This is when someone calls saying you missed jury duty and will be arrested if you do not pay a fine. Sheriff’s deputies will not arrest someone for not going to jury duty.
- Never send money or give out personal information such as credit card numbers, bank account numbers, dates of birth, or Social Security numbers to unfamiliar companies or unknown persons.
- Many scams involve victims purchasing iTunes Apple gift cards. Utilities and companies will not accept payment with iTunes Apple gift cards. If someone calls demanding the purchase of iTunes Apple gift cards to pay a bill, it is a scam.
- Do not answer any call where you do not recognize the number. Remember, no agency will collect money through gift cards.
- Talk to family and friends or call your lawyer, accountant or banker and get their advice before you make any large purchases or investment over the phone with a stranger.
- Check out unfamiliar companies with your local consumer protection agency, Better Business Bureau, the National Fraud Information Center, or other watchdog groups.
- Don’t forget the power to simply hang up the phone when a stranger calls trying to sell you something you don’t want!