



New York State Attorney General Letitia James

Tips on Charitable Giving *during COVID-19*

COVID-19 pandemic has created new challenges for all of us, and enormous needs for families of those affected by the disease, people who have lost their jobs, healthcare workers lacking protective equipment, organizations trying to fulfill those needs and many more. At the same time, generous New Yorkers and people throughout the country, as they have done during countless other disasters, seek ways to help.

To make sure that your contributions go to legitimate relief organizations and directly to help victims, please consider these tips:

- **Check Before Giving.** Donate to charities you are familiar with and carefully review information about the charity before you give. Most charities are required to register and file financial reports with the Attorney General's Charities Bureau if they solicit contributions from New Yorkers. Check our website, www.charitiesnys.com, for financial reports of charities or ask the charity directly for its reports.
- **Ask How Your Donation Will Be Used.** Find out how the charity plans to use your donation, including the services and individuals your donation will support. Find out more than just the cause. Being told only that your money will go "to fight COVID," "support first responders," or "support workers" does not tell you enough. Find out what organization or entity will receive the money and what programs it conducts or what services it provides.
- **Look Into Newly Formed Organizations Carefully.** Often, in the aftermath of tragedies, new organizations emerge to meet community needs. While most of these organizations are well-intentioned, and some may provide innovative forms of assistance, some may not have the experience or infrastructure to follow through on their promises, and some may turn out to be scams.

- **Solicited by Email? Find Out Who is Soliciting.** If you receive a solicitation by email, find out who is behind that email address. Contact the charity whose name is in the email or visit its website to find out if the email is really from the charity. Do not give personal information or your credit card number in response to an email solicitation unless you have checked out the charity.
- **Be Careful When Giving Through Social Media or other fundraising sites.** As with other tragedies, social media sites are being used to raise money for victims of COVID-19 or charities. Before giving through these sites, research the identity of the organizer of the fundraising efforts and ask the same questions you would of a charity. Online platforms that host groups and individuals soliciting for causes may not thoroughly vet those who use their service. Donors should only give to campaigns conducted by people whom they know. Donors also should take a close look at the site's FAQs and Terms and Conditions to see what fees will be charged. Also, don't assume that charities recommended on social media sites, blogs, or other websites have already been vetted. Research the charity yourself to confirm that the charity is aware of the campaign and has given its approved permission for the use of its name or logo. If available, sign up for updates from the campaign organizer to keep abreast on how contributions to the campaign are being spent (i.e., if for meals for first responders, updates to demonstrate meals were purchased or if for "PPE" updates that show PPE being donated).
- **Exercise Caution Before You Text A Contribution.** Check the charity's website or call the charity to confirm it has authorized contributions to be made via text message.
- **Don't Give Cash.** Give directly to the charity either by check made payable to the organization or through the charity's website.
- **Be Careful About Personal Information.** Be cautious before giving credit card or personal information over the phone, by text message or via the Internet. In all cases, make sure you are familiar with the organization to which you give such information and check to see that the fundraising campaign is legitimate.
- **Report Suspicious Organizations.** If you believe an organization is misrepresenting its work, or that a fundraising or charitable scam is taking place, please contact the Charities Bureau at charities.complaints@ag.ny.gov.