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Consumer alert: DCP reminder about rental scams

Avoid sending money for rental properties without verifying legitimacy of listing

Submitted by the New York Department of State's Division of Consumer Protection

For this week's "Tuesday's Tips," the New York Department of State's Division of Consumer Protection is sharing tips to help New Yorkers identify and avoid rental scams.

"In today's highly competitive housing market, renters are often targeted by scammers who use enticing offers to steal New Yorkers' hard-earned money," Secretary of State Robert J. Rodriguez said.

Looking for a rental home or apartment can be an expensive and time-consuming process. Renters are often competing for limited housing or looking for deals, and scammers are quick to take advantage of them.

In 2023, the FBI received 9,521

real estate/rental scam-related complaints with losses of over \$145 million.

To help prevent a costly mistake, below are key tips on how to identify and avoid rental scams:

Confirm that the rental listing is legitimate and verify the source of the listing. Scammers often post fake listings of properties that are not on the market, or may copy a photo or description of a property from another source to use in their ad.

To verify if a rental is legitimate: Search the location's address. If ads come up for the same address, but with a different owner, rental company or rent amount, that's a sign it could be a scam.

Run a reverse image search and see if you can find the listing anywhere else on the internet. Scammers may use photos from a legitimate listing to create a phony one. If you perform a reverse image search and find another listing of the home or apartment with a different address or contact information, that's a red flag that it could be a scam.

Visit real estate websites and see if the rental you want is also listed in another city or available on another website with a different email address or contact informa-

tion. Verify the identity of any real estate professional. Confirm that the real estate professional you're working with is licensed in New York by following these steps:

Visit the eAccessNY Occupational Licensing Management System to look up their license.

Conduct an independent online search for that real estate agent or broker and call the office phone number to confirm they are the agent handling the listing, and to verify their contact information included in the listing.

Request to see a copy of the Department of State-issued photo license and arrange an in-person or video meeting to compare the ID.

See what other people have to say. Look for complaints about the company or agent.

Inspect the premises. Avoid completing background checks, signing a lease agreement or paying any advance fees or deposits before having an opportunity to inspect the premises.

Be suspicious if asked to use payment methods that are untraceable. Scammers generally conduct transactions by phone, text message or email, and often ask for payment by wire transfer, prepaid debit card, money-transfer app, cryptocurrency, or other methods of payment that are not easily traceable. Instead, pay by check or credit card, and get

receipts for any payments.

Make payments to the brokerage of record. In New York, it is unlawful for a real estate person to demand a fee directly from the prospective tenant. Fees are paid to the brokerage where the agent is associated with, and the broker pays the agent for their services.

Request everything in writing. It is always better to leave a paper trail. Real estate professionals are required by law to provide you with copies of all instruments relating to the transaction.

Don't give in to high-pressure sales tactics. Scammers may urge you to rent quickly before someone else gets the property, prompting you to possibly miss an important step in the evaluation process. While the rental market is tough right now with low supply and high demand, remember to be cautious about all the steps involved in a real estate transaction - including carefully reviewing the lease agreement and verifying the identity of those you are engaged with during the rental transaction.

Protect your privacy. Scammers often request personal information and money for background checks, then disappear. Refrain from providing personal information or your Social Security number unless you are absolutely sure you are dealing with a reputable business or agent.

Kara's Korner

Town of Porter news and notes

BY KARA HIBBARD

Porter Town Clerk

Hi everyone!

I wanted to let you know about a few things that are going on in the Town of Porter.

Short-term rental homes require registration with the town code enforcement officer. Letters were sent out to residents in 2023. If you have not registered, please go to the Townofporter.net website and click on departments/building inspector.

Since 2009, the DEC has enforced the annual brush burning ban from the period of March 16 through May 14 to prevent wildfires, reduce air pollution, and protect communities during height-

ened conditions for wildfires. In regard to our brush pickup, there will be a townwide brush pickup the week of April 22-26. The normal schedule resumes in May and continues through Oct. 1. Pickups are on the first Monday of each month for the Youngstown side of the town, and the third Monday of the month for the Ransomville side. The final townwide pickup will be Nov. 4-8.

The Highway Department is hiring for the summer help, possibly leading to full time. Please apply at the Town Highway Garage, 1800 Braley Road, Ransomville, during normal business hours.

The town clerk's office is now done collecting taxes for the year.

If you need to pay your taxes, you can reach out to the Niagara County Treasurer's Office at 716-439-7007. If you have any questions about your school tax, please reach out to the school tax collector at 716-286-7243.

We have been notified of lost, abandoned and stolen dogs that have been "dropped off" in the town. If you happen to see a dog that seems lost, please reach out to the SPCA and let them know. The SPCA is the official "dog catcher" in the Town of Porter.

All dogs that reside in the town must be licensed. The cost is \$18 for a dog that is unspayed/unneutered or \$10 if neutered/spayed. Please bring in a copy of the rabies

certificate to register your dog that is 4 months of age or older. You can even bring your dog in, too!

Need a copy of a birth, marriage or death record? There are forms online to fill out, or you can stop by Town Hall and fill them out. The cost is \$10 per copy for a certified transcript.

Looking for a certified copy of your marriage license? Here, you'll be able to find it where you filled out your marriage license, not where you were married, unless it was in the same town.

Wrapping up, the annual Summerfest in the Town of Porter will be Saturday, July 20, at Porter on the Lake Park. Hope to see everyone there!

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