

## Consumer alert: NYS DCP provides tips to avoid charity impersonation scams

### Scams are more prevalent after a natural disaster or emergencies

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

The New York State Department of State's Division of Consumer Protection (DCP) aims to raise awareness about charity scams. Donations of any kind can make a real impact on a good cause, which is why charity scams are especially cruel. Unfortunately, scammers never miss an opportunity to defraud people, so it's important to remember that not all donation requests are legitimate. The division has created this quick guide to help donors do their own due diligence on the charities seeking their support.

"After a major event such as a natural disaster, tragedy, or as the season of giving unfolds, scammers prey on the good intentions of people and take money that could otherwise help individuals and programs in need," Secretary of State Robert Rodriguez said. "In order to ensure that donations go to the right place, we encourage New Yorkers to research and confirm charity claims before making a donation."

Charity scams can happen at any time, but they are more prevalent

after a natural disaster or emergencies, collecting millions of dollars from unsuspecting donors. On many occasions, these fraudsters pretend to be affiliated with well-known organizations or even the government to scam people out of their hard-earned money. According to the Federal Trade Commission about 2.8 million people nationwide reported being victims of someone pretending to be a trusted charity source in 2021, causing losses of about \$2.3 billion.

To prevent your donation money from falling into the wrong hands, DCP recommends taking the following precautions:

✓ Check the legitimacy of the charitable organization. Research the charity by searching the New York State attorney general's online database of registered charities at [charitiesnys.com](http://charitiesnys.com), and by visiting websites such as [bbb.org](http://bbb.org), [www.give.org](http://www.give.org) and [www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org), in addition to visiting the charity's website. If donating toward relief efforts after a natural disaster, check a site like [disasterphilanthropy.org](http://disasterphilanthropy.org) to be sure your money is going to truly help those in need.

✓ Learn how to detect a phony

charity. Some scammers will create fake "charities" and try to trick you with similar names of well-known charities. Pay attention to the charity's name, web address, logos, etc. Scammers often mimic the names of familiar, trusted organizations to fool donors.

✓ Designate your donation. Find out what percentage of your donation will go directly toward the cause as opposed to administrative costs. Ask the charity whether you can designate your donation to a specific effort rather than a general contribution fund. If the solicitation comes from a professional for-profit fundraising company, be aware that the charitable organization will receive only a percentage of your donation. If you want to ensure the charity receives the whole amount, donate directly instead.

✓ Pay attention to vague claims. Pay attention to language such as "all proceeds go to charity" or "your purchase will benefit a charity." A disclosure should be provided that includes the actual or estimated purchase price amount the charity will receive directly.

✓ Resist high-pressure tactics.

Charity fraud scams can come in many forms, whether by email, social media, crowdfunding platforms, cold calls, etc. Watch out for direct emails from "victims" and solicitors who employ heart-wrenching stories, insisting that you donate immediately. It is strongly advised not to give money over the phone to unsolicited telemarketers, and instead ask the caller to send written materials about the charity.

✓ Find out who's behind the crowdfunding request. Online platforms like GoFundMe make it easy for people to create crowdfunding campaigns. To protect yourself, remember to give to people you know directly. It's also important to understand the crowdfunding site's rules, policies, and vetting procedures. It can be helpful to know these ahead of time to determine how they are protecting consumers from potential fraud.

✓ Do not disclose personal or financial information to unsolicited requests. Never give your Social Security number, credit card or debit card number or other personal identifying information in response to an unsolicited charitable

request.

✓ Avoid giving cash. Give your contribution by check or credit card to ensure that you have a record of the donation. Make checks out to the charity, not to an individual. If you choose to make a donation via a charity's website, check that the website is secure and that your computer is equipped with the latest antivirus protection. Do not send contributions with a "runner," by wire or overnight parcel pick-up.

✓ Don't assume. Check out an organization's tax status at [irs.gov/app/eos](http://irs.gov/app/eos) to find out if the donation is tax-deductible. Ask for a receipt and trace the status of your donation.

*The New York State Division of Consumer Protection provides resources and education materials to consumers on product safety, as well as voluntary mediation services between consumers and businesses. The consumer assistance helpline 1-800-697-1220 is available from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays, excluding holidays. Consumer complaints can be filed any time at [www.dos.ny.gov/consumer-protection](http://www.dos.ny.gov/consumer-protection).*

## IN THE NEWS

### Legislature recognizes National Adoption Awareness Month

The Niagara County Legislature passed a proclamation at its meeting Tuesday night in honor of National Adoption Awareness Month.

The campaign is promoted each November to increase awareness of adoption issues, bring attention to the need for adoptive families for children in the U.S. foster care system, and emphasize the value of youth engagement.

"With the completion of an adoption, a child finally has permanency in their life and the opportunity to realize their full potential surrounded by a family that cares about them," said Meghan Lutz, Niagara County Department of Social Services commissioner. "Niagara County finalized 19 adoptions in 2021 and has completed 10 so far this year. Many of these start with a family who initially provides foster care to a child. So, I encourage anyone who has ever thought of fostering or adopting a child to contact us."

### County taking part in correction officers recruitment pilot

As Niagara County prepares to recruit its next round of corrections officers, it is taking part in a state pilot program that will score candidates on baseline criteria like training and experience, and eliminate the need to take a civil service exam.

Interested candidates have until Nov. 29 to complete the application, and then have until Jan. 15, 2023, to fill out an online questionnaire that covers their training, experience, any special skills and so on.

A press release stated, "All applications will be graded by New York state to create the hiring list. Candidates must still pass a physical agility test, but will be allowed a second attempt to pass if needed. This program has been piloted in other parts of the state and, thus far, has proved to be successful."

"We see significant benefits to this pilot program as we believe it focuses more on individual quali-

fications and experience, which will lead to a stronger pool of applicants," said Mal Needler, Niagara County personnel officer. "The state is looking to cast a wide net, and gives points for a varied range of experience. We also hope this new process will expand the candidate pool, since we know there are interested candidates who have been discouraged from applying by their reluctance to take the written test."

Niagara County Sheriff Michael Filicetti said correction officers are an important component of keeping our communities safe.

"The work of correction officers can be challenging," he said. "They play a critical role in keeping our community safe by maintaining order inside the walls of our correctional facility. If you are an individual with strong integrity and character, have empathy and an interest in law enforcement, come join the dedicated team at the Niagara County Sheriff's Office."

Those who want more information or wish to apply should go to <https://niagara-portal.mycivilservice.com/exams>.

### Niagara PAL to add costume contest to 'Santa Dash 5K'

Featured for the fifth annual Niagara PAL "Santa Dash 5K" on Saturday, Dec. 10, at the Sheraton Niagara Falls, will be the holiday/winter-themed costume contest for all runners. Cash awards will be given for the best costumes. Runner awards will be given for the top three finishers in the respective categories, with long-sleeved T-shirts presented to the first 150 runners.

Registration is \$25 pre-race or \$30 on race day. Preregistration at [score-this.com](http://score-this.com). Race day registration starts at 7 a.m., followed by the race at 9 a.m. The certified course is along Old Falls Street to the Niagara Scenic Parkway along the Upper Niagara River to the Old Stone Chimney, and back along Riverwalk and Riverway.

As added attractions, there will be four races within the race: The Doughnut Cup Challenge with police officers from various law enforcement agencies competing

for the right to claim the "Doughnut Cup Trophy" for the year; the First Responder Challenge, with firefighters, EMTs and medical professionals vying to claim the trophy depicting their role; the Educators Trophy for all teachers, administrators and support personnel; and the High School Classic, with teams of five runners using cross-country scoring in an effort to take their trophy back to their school.

All runners in the special races are eligible for awards in their age division in the "Santa Dash." The post-race party and awards will be in the Torrent Restaurant at the Sheraton with music by Nicholas Picholas.

A basket auction will be held in the Sheraton lobby and Torrent Restaurant from 9-11:30 a.m. Up to 100 auction items are expected, along with special drawings. Events are a part of the Jingle Falls festivities. Parking is free in the city lot. All proceeds benefit Niagara PAL youth programs.

For more, go to [www.niagarapal.com](http://www.niagarapal.com), call PAL at 716-286-7038, or email [arte498043@aol.com](mailto:arte498043@aol.com).

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