

# ILLINOIS ATTORNEY GENERAL LISA MADIGAN

## PRESS



## RELEASE

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### \*\*\*CONSUMER ALERT\*\*\*

#### **MADIGAN WARNS ILLINOIS CHARITIES OF ELABORATE DONATION SCAM** *Attorney General's Office Reports of Interactive Email Scam Targeting Illinois Charities*

**Chicago** – Attorney General Lisa Madigan today alerted Illinois charities to a sophisticated email scam offering organizations large and unsolicited donations from a man who claims to be carrying out the final wishes of his deceased mother.

Madigan's office has been notified by several Illinois charities that were suspicious of a potential scam after engaging in lengthy and believable email conversations with a supposed donor. Luckily, the charities did not fall victim to the scam, but passed along information in an effort to warn others.

Madigan's office understands the scam to be centered on a donor who identifies himself as "Rob Whitlock" of Great Britain. He promises to donate a large sum of money in memory of his mother who passed away earlier in the year. The emails detail his mother's wishes and her support of a specific charity's mission, using emotional pleas to increase the authenticity of the proposal.

Upon conducting basic internet research, the charities find that "Rob Whitlock" appears to exist and a business website includes a photo and telephone number. But in reality, the website is fake. Whitlock's scam involves sending a check that includes a larger amount than promised, which is designed to be received as a welcome gift. However, emails follow claiming Whitlock's accountant made a mistake and the additional funds need to be wired back to him immediately because he has promised to help a local family with medical support for their ailing daughter.

It appears that some charitable organizations have caught on to the scam and contacted their banks about the unsolicited donation to learn the check is being returned by the bank because it is altered or fictitious. Other charities appear to have, unfortunately, fallen for the scam and "returned" the overage to Whitlock, losing a large amount of money.

Madigan urges Illinois charities to be on the lookout for this elaborate and persuasive type of donation scam.

"Unfortunately like many scams we see, this situation is too good to be true," Madigan said. "We are certain these emails are the handiwork of at least one scammer looking to take advantage of

Illinois charities that could use unsolicited gifts to support their missions.”

Madigan’s office offers the following tips for charities considering accepting a donation:

- If it seems too good to be true, it probably is.
- Take time to research donors thoroughly. Do not rely solely on the internet. Take time to speak with industry peers and others to gather their insights and feedback on potential donors.
- Real donors can be trusted to share important details and will offer to meet in person. Their communication typically does not include spelling or grammar mistakes.
- Do not refund any money until you have checked with your bank to confirm the funds have cleared.

Madigan encourages Illinois charities to report suspicious solicitations by contacting her Charitable Trust Bureau at (312) 814-2595.