

Protecting Ohio's Families

Keeping Seniors Safe and Informed

Con artists and scammers often target older Ohioans. Learn to recognize the signs of a scam to protect yourself and those you love.



MIKE DEWINE

OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL

Dear Fellow Ohioans:

Too often, older Ohioans fall prey to con artists and scammers whose intent is to take advantage of them.

Caution and information are the best defenses against those who try to intentionally victimize our seniors. That's why my office prepared this booklet: We want to empower older Ohioans, their families, and those who care for them to avoid scams and fraud.

I urge you to review this information and discuss it with loved ones and friends. By staying vigilant and knowledgeable, asking questions, and sharing concerns, you can protect yourself and avoid financial harm.

For additional information about how the Attorney General's Office protects Ohio's families and seniors, visit **www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov** or call our Help Center at **800-282-0515**.

Very respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mike DeWine". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mike" and last name "DeWine" clearly distinguishable.

Mike DeWine
Ohio Attorney General



Look out for **SCAMS!**

Scammers use a variety of tactics to make their offers seem legitimate. Their initial contact may occur by telephone, mail, door-to-door solicitations, fliers, e-mails, or phony websites. They often try to convince consumers to send them money or give personal information, such as bank account numbers and Social Security numbers. Be aware of the common signs of a scam.

Signs of a **SCAM**

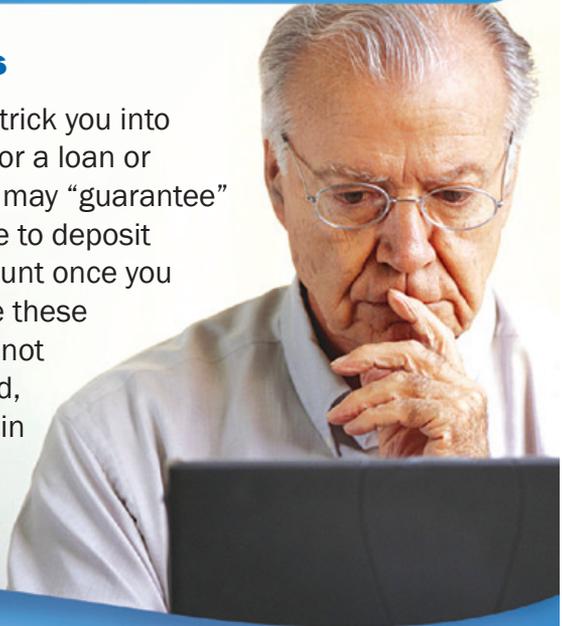
- You're asked to wire money to a stranger.
- You've won a contest you've never heard of or entered.
- You're pressured to "act now!"
- You have to pay a fee to receive your "prize."
- Your personal information is requested.
- A large down payment is requested.
- A company refuses to provide written information.
- A company has no physical address, only a P.O. box.



Beware of these common scams

Advance Fee Loans

In this ploy, scam artists trick you into paying money to qualify for a loan or credit card. Scam artists may “guarantee” a line of credit or promise to deposit money in your bank account once you pay an initial fee. Despite these claims, however, you will not receive a loan, credit card, or any money. Never pay in advance to qualify for a loan or credit card.



Credit Repair Scams

These scams involve false promises that bad credit can be erased, interest rates can be lowered, and debts can be consolidated. Many of these companies charge hundreds or thousands of dollars but do little

or nothing to improve your credit. The reality is that they cannot erase accurate negative information from your credit report. With certain exceptions, negative information will remain on your credit report for up to seven years. If you want to improve your credit, contact a nonprofit credit counseling agency or your creditor directly. You may be able to arrange a payment plan yourself — at no or very little cost.



Fake Check Scams

Someone sends you a check or money order. You are asked to deposit it in your bank account and wire transfer the sender a portion of the money, minus a nice bonus for you as a “thank you” for helping out. Regardless of the pitch, the result is the same: The check or money order you receive will be counterfeit. It will be returned to your bank unpaid and the full amount will be deducted from your account, usually along with an additional bank fee. Never wire transfer money to a stranger.

Family and Caregiver Scams

Sadly, family members, caregivers, and friends are the offenders in many cases of financial abuse involving the elderly. They might use seniors’ credit cards without permission, pressure them to sign over their power of attorney, or forge their signature. Watch for signs of a family or caregiver scam, including a senior’s bills going unpaid, a new “best friend,” exclusion from other family members or friends, unusual banking activities, or missing belongings.





Foreclosure Rescue Scams

These scams target homeowners who are having trouble making their house payments. A phony foreclosure rescue company might contact you and promise to negotiate with your lender. You pay thousands of dollars, but the company makes little or no contact with your lender. Never pay an advance fee for a loan modification.

In some cases, a phony “investor” offers to buy your house and lease it back to you until you can afford your mortgage payments. The investor takes your money, but does not transfer the mortgage loan or pay your lender. As a result, you risk losing your equity and your home. Help is available for free. Call Save the Dream Ohio toll-free at **888-404-4674**.

Grandparent Scams

In this scam, con artists pose as grandchildren. They call with a false story, explaining that they are in trouble in another city or country and need you to send money via wire transfer. Of course, any money you send will go to the scammer, not to your grandchild. When in doubt, ask the caller a question only your family members would know how to answer and call your son or daughter to confirm the location of your grandchild.



Home Improvement Fraud

This occurs when contractors or companies do little or no work they were paid to do. Door-to-door contractors may offer to repair your roof, pave your driveway, or trim your trees for a good price. After you pay, however, the contractor disappears without doing any work or after doing a poor job.

Scam artists may say they will give you a discount or that they have leftover supplies from repairing another house in the neighborhood. These false promises are tricks to steal your money. To avoid scams:

- Beware of contractors that show up at your door. Ohio law requires that sellers give you a three-day right to cancel most door-to-door sales, and no work should begin before the three days.
- Research a contractor by calling the Ohio Attorney General's Office and Better Business Bureau.
- Don't make large down payments or pay in full until the work is complete.
- Get the exact cost in writing. Don't accept verbal estimates.



Identity Theft

This occurs when someone fraudulently uses your personal information, such as your bank account number or Social Security number, to obtain credit, take out a loan, receive medical treatment, get identification, or otherwise pretend to be you. Identity thieves may open new accounts in a consumer's name, purchase products, and then leave the consumer to pay the bill. To help prevent identity theft, never give personal information to anyone you don't know or trust.





Investment Fraud

A scammer might offer you a “risk-free” investment only to steal your money. For example, some scam artists convince consumers to invest in coins and precious metals, such as gold. Remember, all investments involve risk. Research a company and consult with trusted family members or friends before making important financial decisions.

Living Trust Scams

A living trust is a legal arrangement in which assets are transferred into a trust while the consumer is still alive, which keeps the assets from going through probate court when the consumer dies. Trusts can be useful estate planning devices, but scam artists have been known to make exaggerated or false claims about probate costs or the tax advantages of living trusts. These scams usually target lower income consumers, whose limited estates likely would incur minimal probate costs. High-pressure sales tactics often are used.

If you or someone you know is considering buying a living trust, consider all your estate planning options and be wary of “one-size-fits-all” offers. Consult an attorney for individual advice before signing contracts or making purchases. There also are legal aid programs that offer free help for seniors 60 and older, regardless of income. Don’t buy legal services from door-to-door salespeople or telemarketers.

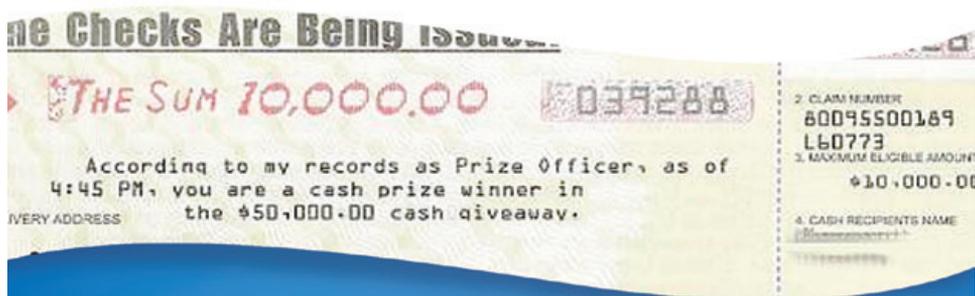
Phishing

Some scammers “phish” for your personal information using cleverly designed calls or e-mails. They often pretend to be an employee of your bank or a government agency and ask you to update or confirm your account information by submitting your bank account number, password, or Social Security number. Never respond to unexpected requests for your personal information.



Phony Charities

Someone pretending to represent a charity calls or sends you a letter asking you to make a charitable donation. Always ask how much of your donation would actually go to the charity. Charitable organizations must register with the Ohio Attorney General’s Office. Before you donate, verify that the charity is legitimate by calling the Attorney General’s Help Center at **800-282-0515**.



Prizes/Sweepstakes Scams

Someone may fictitiously claim that you have won the lottery, a contest, or a prize that you have never signed up to win. To collect your winnings, however, you’ll be asked to pay a fee. Often, you’ll be instructed to send money via wire transfer or money order, possibly to a foreign country. They’ll tell you to expect your winnings once you pay, but the prize never arrives. Remember that legitimate sweepstakes are free and require no up-front payment.

Reverse Mortgage Abuse

A reverse mortgage is not a scam; it is a loan accruing interest that allows older consumers to convert home equity into cash. However, some unscrupulous salespeople might pressure you into taking out a reverse mortgage that has very high fees. Others tempt you to use money from the loan to buy annuities or investments that may not benefit you.

Do not take out a reverse mortgage unless you fully understand all the costs, terms, and conditions. Keep in mind that reverse mortgages substantially reduce your home equity, and the total amount you owe will grow over time.

Sale of Unbeneficial Annuities

Consumers who buy a living trust should be wary of salespeople who come back and offer additional products, such as an annuity. When you buy an annuity, you give a large sum of money to an insurance company, and it pays you back on a regular basis, usually for as long as you live or for a specific period of time.

There are many different kinds of annuities, and buyers should clearly understand which type of annuity they are buying, what it will cost them, when the company will be paying the money back, the amount of early withdrawal penalties, and the risk factors involved. Dishonest, high-pressure salespeople will charge high fees and sell deferred annuities that often are not suitable for the consumer's current age and financial situation. Read all the terms and conditions and seek advice from people you trust before making a major financial investment.

Veterans' Benefits Misinformation

Some companies will offer information about veterans' benefits to gain your trust. They may falsely imply that they work for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), make exaggerated claims about your benefits, or encourage you to buy financial products you don't need. For reliable information about VA benefits, contact your County Veterans Service Office.



Work-at-Home and Business Opportunity Ploys

These scams use sales pitches claiming that you can make good money working from home or getting involved in a business opportunity. You will be urged to pay in advance for materials or start-up costs. Ultimately, the only people who will profit are the scam artists. Beware of seminars that promise money-making advice but deliver only high-pressure sales pitches.





Protect Yourself!

You're already doing the right thing by staying informed about the latest consumer scams.

Here are important tips to help you stay safe and protect your pocketbook.



NEVER
wire money
to a stranger!

✓ Research businesses and charities: Before doing business with a company, check its reputation with the Ohio Attorney General's Office and the Better Business Bureau. Ask family and friends for recommendations. Never pay money to a person or a company that refuses to give you written information, a phone number, a physical address, or references.

✓ Read the fine print: Read all the terms and conditions of any agreement before you sign. Get warranties and all verbal promises in writing. Review contracts with a trusted attorney, friend, or family member. If a fraudulent charge appears on your bank or credit card statement, immediately notify your bank.

✔ **Remember your rights:** Ohio consumer laws protect you from unfair, deceptive, and unconscionable practices in consumer transactions. For example, advertisements must list exclusions and limitations, and a store must post its return policy clearly. In Ohio, it is illegal to charge a fee for winning a prize.

✔ **Reconsider the purchase:** Don't give in to high-pressure sales tactics. If it's a "good deal" today, it should be a good deal tomorrow, too. Never give personal information to someone you don't know or trust. Ask companies how they will use your personal information. Never sign anything you do not understand. Ask questions and demand answers.

✔ **Report scams and unfair practices:** If you have a problem with a purchase you made, notify the company in writing. Explain your complaint and give a deadline for resolution.

If you suspect a scam or cannot resolve the problem on your own, file a complaint with the Ohio Attorney General's Office at **www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov** or call **800-282-0515**.



Get more information

Check out these trusted resources for more information to protect yourself from consumer fraud.



Credit

Get your free credit report. You're entitled to one free copy of your credit report each year from each of the three credit reporting companies.

Contact:

Annual Credit Report Request Service
www.annualcreditreport.com
877-322-8228
P.O. Box 105281
Atlanta, GA 30348-5281

Credit Freeze

A credit freeze limits third parties from accessing your credit reports and may help prevent certain types of identity theft. You may be charged a fee of up to \$5 to place or remove a security freeze. Generally, there is no charge for victims of identity theft. To place a freeze on each of your three main reports:

Contact:

Equifax: www.equifax.com, 800-525-6285
Experian: www.experian.com/fraud, 888-397-3742
TransUnion: www.transunion.com, 800-680-7289

Credit Rebuilding

Fixing your credit is hard work. Companies that claim they can restore your credit or consolidate or erase debt may charge money for services that do little or nothing to resolve your situation. To find a nonprofit credit counseling service in your area:

Contact:

The National Foundation for Credit Counseling
www.nfcc.org, 800-388-2227

Identity Theft

Report identity theft to law enforcement. Also notify your bank and creditors and add a fraud alert to your credit reports by contacting one of the three credit reporting companies (Equifax, Experian, or TransUnion), which in turn will notify the other two companies. For help correcting errors on your credit report or other effects of identity theft, file an identity theft notification form with the Ohio Attorney General's Consumer Protection Section, Identity Theft Unit.

Contact:

www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov
800-282-0515

Insurance

Contact the Ohio Department of Insurance for information about all types of insurance. The department also provides Medicare information through its Ohio Senior Health Insurance Information Program (OSHIIP).

Contact:

www.insurance.ohio.gov
Consumer Hotline: 800-686-1526
Medicare OSHIIP: 800-686-1578

Investments and Securities

The Ohio Department of Commerce can help you learn the ins and outs of safe investing and securities fraud.

Contact:

www.com.ohio.gov

877-N VEST 411 (877-683-7841)

Legal Assistance

Pro Seniors is a nonprofit organization that provides free legal and long-term care assistance to older adults. Its Legal Hotline provides free legal information, advice, and referrals for Ohio residents age 60 and older.

Contact:

www.proseniors.org

800-488-6070

Long-Term Care

The Ohio Department of Aging offers a Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program to advocate for people receiving home care, assisted living, and nursing home care.

Contact:

www.aging.ohio.gov

Contact an ombudsman: 800-282-1206

Medicaid Provider Fraud

The Ohio Attorney General's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit investigates allegations of Medicaid provider fraud. If you know of corrupt or deceptive practices by a Medicaid provider, contact the Medicaid Fraud Control Unit.

Contact:

www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov/ReportMedicaidFraud
614-466-0722 or 800-282-0515

Mortgage Problems

Save the Dream Ohio connects homeowners having trouble making their house payment with a local HUD-approved housing counseling agency or legal assistance.

Contact:

www.savethedream.ohio.gov
888-404-4674

Patient Abuse and Neglect

The Ohio Attorney General's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit investigates allegations of abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation involving residents of Ohio care facilities. If you know of a patient experiencing abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation, contact the Medicaid Fraud Control Unit.

Contact:

www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov/ReportPatientAbuse
614-466-0722 or 800-282-0515

Researching Businesses

Learn about a business by checking with the Ohio Attorney General's Office and the Better Business Bureau.

Contact:

www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov, 800-282-0515
www.bbb.org

Services for Veterans

The Ohio Department of Veterans Services advocates for veterans and their families. It also can direct you to benefits resources, including contact information for your County Veterans Service Office. The Ohio Attorney General's Office also provides services for veterans and their families.

Contact:

www.dvs.ohio.gov
877-OHIO VET (877-644-6838)

www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov/ServicesforVeterans
800-282-0515

Unwanted Calls

Reduce telemarketing calls by registering with the National Do Not Call Registry. Registration is permanent unless you remove your number from the list.

Most telemarketers must stop calling you once your number has been on the registry for 31 days. Even if you are registered, charities, political organizations, and telephone surveyors may continue to call you. Companies with which you do business also may continue to call unless you tell them to put you on their internal do not call list.

Contact:

www.donotcall.gov

888-382-1222; TTY, 866-290-4236

Unwanted Mail

Reduce the amount of mail you receive from national catalog and marketing companies by registering with the Mail Preference Service from the Direct Marketing Association. The organization also offers an e-mail preference service and do-not-contact service for the sick, disabled, or deceased.

Contact:

www.dmachoice.org

212-768-7277, Ext. 1500

Mail Preference Service

1120 Avenue of the Americas

New York, NY 10036

Limit the pre-approved credit card offers you receive by registering with OptOutPrescreen.com.

Contact:

www.optoutprescreen.com

888-5OPT-OUT (888-567-8688)

Elder Fraud

Ohio Attorney General's
Consumer Protection Section
30 E. Broad St., 14th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215



MIKE DEWINE
OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL

For more information, to report a scam, or to schedule a speaker on consumer protection issues, contact Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine's office at [www. OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov](http://www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov) or **800-282-0515**.

For TTY, please call Relay Ohio at **800-750-0750**.