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Cordray Joins Charity in Warning of Fraudulent Solicitations
Scammers falsely claim they're collecting donations for paralyzed vets

(COLUMBUS, Ohio) – Preying on the generosity of Ohioans during this holiday season, scam artists are soliciting donations in the name of the Buckeye Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA). Ohio Attorney General Richard Cordray said today the scammers are believed to be former employees of Benefit Systems of America, a professional solicitation company based in Powell, Oh.

"What these scam artists are doing is illegal and reprehensible," said Attorney General Cordray. "They're using stories about heroic veterans and the good reputation of a legitimate charity to con honest Ohioans out of their hard-earned money. It's disgusting."

On Oct. 7, 2009, the Attorney General's Office filed a lawsuit against Benefit Systems of America for numerous violations of law including hiring convicted felons to work in company call centers and using false and misleading solicitation practices. After learning of the alleged violations, the Buckeye Chapter PVA canceled its fundraising contract with Benefit Systems, terminating all solicitations. Benefit Systems has since closed its doors and ceased operations. Cordray's office believes one or more former employees are using Benefit Systems' call lists to solicit donations from Ohioans who may have previously donated to the Buckeye Chapter PVA.

The Buckeye Chapter PVA has cooperated fully with the Attorney General's investigation of Benefit Systems. However, as a result of these developments, the charity lost significant fundraising revenue and has suffered financial hardship. The PVA relies upon private donations to provide services to paralyzed veterans and other physically challenged individuals and families throughout Ohio.

"Buckeye Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans works 24/7 for those who have served and sacrificed for our freedoms," said Carl Harris, President of the Buckeye Chapter. "We are outraged that our good name is being misrepresented to the public. We are working with the Attorney General to hold accountable those who apparently want to take advantage of our heroes during the season of giving," said Harris, a paralyzed veteran himself.

The public can help track down these scammers, Cordray said.

"If anyone gets a solicitation from a caller claiming to represent the Buckeye Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America, they should contact my office so we can investigate. Information from caller ID or recorded phone calls would be particularly helpful," he said.

Cordray said this latest scam should not discourage Ohioans from donating to a charity; however, they should

ask questions and check out the charity before making a donation.

There are several moves that donors should always avoid:

- Don't provide bank or credit card information over the phone on calls that you didn't expect.
- Don't donate when the caller uses high-pressure tactics.
- Don't make out a check to an individual or to cash. Always make the check out to the name of the charity.
- Don't give when the caller can't answer questions about the charity.
- Don't give when someone offers to come to your house to pick up your gift.
- Don't be enticed to make donations because of promises of prizes, cash awards or sweepstakes.

Citizens can contact the Attorney General's office at (800) 282-0515.

Anyone interested in making a donation to the Buckeye Chapter PVA can call the charity directly at (216) 731-1017 or send a donation to the Buckeye Chapter Paralyzed Veterans of America, 26250 Euclid Ave., Suite 115, Euclid, OH 44132.

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