



Tuesday, December 1st, 2020



Elder Fraud Prevention Campaign during COVID-19

SAN JUAN, P.R. - The United States Attorney for the District of Puerto Rico, W. Stephen Muldrow, and the Elder Justice Task Force (EJTF) announced today the launch of an elder fraud education and prevention campaign during the COVID-19 pandemic.



The public service campaign aims to raise awareness about the different types of fraud associated with the pandemic that have been prevalent during these past months; advise senior citizens and their caretakers on how to prevent becoming victims of these scams; and inform the different ways to report cases of fraud. The campaign encourages the public to provide information to the federal and state authorities in a confidential manner.



“This educational campaign seeks to provide the elderly and the general public with the tools to prevent criminals from taking advantage of the crisis we are living through. As I have stated in previous occasions, the well-being of our elderly citizens during this pandemic is one of our main priorities. I commend the efforts of the Elder Justice Task Force and those who have joined our mission during this emergency,” said U.S. Attorney Muldrow.



The Acting Secretary of the Puerto Rico Department of Justice, Inés del C. Carrau Martínez, urged Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries to protect themselves, be cautious, and disregard any unsolicited calls or visits that offer COVID-19 testing, vaccinations, or medical equipment, if they suspect anything is amiss. “We are dealing with a serious and complex health issue. We have to take care of our elderly so they don’t become a target for scams through false advertisement or offers,” stated Secretary Carrau.



“We have been very diligent in providing guidance to the population we serve and at senior centers so that they do not become victims of fraud. Today we are doubling our efforts with this excellent task force in order to raise awareness about these illegal practices,” said the Secretary of the Puerto Rico Department of Family Affairs, Orlando López Belmonte.



“As part of this initiative, we call on the family caretakers who support the elderly to be alert, because they are a key part in detecting, avoiding, and reporting these new scams associated with COVID-19 that threaten their own and their loved ones’ financial safety,” warned José R. Acarón, local director of AARP PR.

“This educational campaign is part of a preventive approach geared towards protecting the rights of the elderly population in Puerto Rico, and fighting crimes that target them. There is a pressing need for education, particularly during the pandemic,” informed Dr. Carmen Delia Sánchez Salgado, Ombudsman for the Elderly.

Other entities that have joined forces in this campaign are the Postal Inspector Service; the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Inspector General; the Federal Trade Commission (FTC); and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

This campaign stems from the Elder Justice Initiative. The EJTF’s mission is to support and coordinate the U.S. Department of Justice’s compliance efforts to combat abuse, neglect, financial fraud, and scams that target our nation’s seniors. The EJTF in Puerto Rico is coordinated by Assistant U.S. Attorney Jacqueline Novas. To report a suspected fraud, please call the following numbers: **National Elder Fraud Hotline 1-833-372-8311; National Center for Disaster Fraud 1-866-720-5721; the FBI Internet Crime Complaint Center 1-800-225-5324; the FTC 1-877-FTC-HELP (382-4357); and/or the HHS - 800-HHS-TIPS (800-447-8477);** or submit a report at the Federal Department of Justice’s website www.Justice.gov/DisasterComplaintForm or through the FTC’s website ReporteFraude.ftc.gov.

Learn more about these scams and how to protect yourself by visiting the fbi.gov/coronavirus and the FTC at ftc.gov/es/coronavirus

Since President Trump signed the bipartisan Elder Abuse Prevention and Prosecution Act (EAPPA) into law, the Department of Justice has participated in hundreds of enforcement actions in criminal and civil cases that targeted or disproportionately affected seniors. The Department has likewise conducted hundreds of trainings and outreach sessions across the country since the passage of the Act.



More information about the Department’s efforts to help American seniors is available at its Elder Justice Initiative webpage (<https://www.justice.gov/elderjustice>). Elder fraud complaints may be filed with the FTC at www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov or at 877-FTC-HELP. The Department of Justice provides a variety of resources relating to elder fraud victimization through its Office for Victims of Crime, which can be reached at <https://www.ovc.gov>.

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