




U. S. Department of Justice

Office of the Deputy Attorney General

The Deputy Attorney General

Washington, D.C. 20530
March 19, 2020

TO: ALL HEADS OF LITIGATING COMPONENTS AND
UNITED STATES ATTORNEYS

FROM: THE DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL 

SUBJECT: Coordinated Nationwide Response to Detect, Deter, and Punish Crime
Relating to the National Emergency Caused by COVID-19

As the Attorney General announced in his March 16, 2020, message to all U.S. Attorneys, we already are seeing allegations of a wide array of fraudulent and otherwise illegal schemes in exploiting the national emergency caused by COVID-19 (the coronavirus). This issue warrants a coordinated, nationwide response. In order to ensure that the Department of Justice effectively and quickly combats unlawful conduct relating to the coronavirus national emergency, I am issuing the following guidance relating to the investigation, disruption, and prosecution of potentially unlawful conduct related to coronavirus.

1. The Department of Justice will guide the public to make all coronavirus-related complaints to the National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) Hotline (1-866-720-5721), or to the NCDF e-mail address (disaster@leo.gov). The NCDF is a national coordinating agency within the Department of Justice's Criminal Division. The NCDF's mission is to improve and further the detection, prevention, investigation, and prosecution of criminal conduct related to natural and man-made disasters, and to advocate for the victims of such offenses. The NCDF Hotline is available to receive reports from the public of potential fraud 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Callers will be connected with a live operator or can leave a message detailing their reports.
2. Where appropriate, the NCDF will enter the complaints into the Federal Trade Commission's Sentinel system. Sentinel is a database that collects complaints from more than 35 nationwide databases and has mechanisms for deconfliction, alerts, and pattern mapping. All law enforcement, including United States Attorney's Offices (USAOs) and DOJ litigating components, have access to Sentinel and can use the full range of its tools to identify schemes relevant to their districts. Most USAOs and litigating components already are using Sentinel, but the Department will provide on-line training as to how to use Sentinel starting early next week.
3. Nothing in this guidance changes the leadership role that USAOs appropriately exercise in federal criminal prosecutions in their districts. Accordingly, all USAOs are hereby directed to designate a Coronavirus Coordinator no later than Friday, March 20, 2020. The Executive Office for United States Attorneys (EOUSA) will be providing information as

to how to report the identity of your Coronavirus Coordinator. The Coronavirus Coordinator will: (a) serve as the legal counsel for the Federal judicial district on matters relating to the coronavirus; (b) prosecute or assist in the prosecution of coronavirus-related cases; and (c) conduct public outreach and awareness activities relating to the coronavirus. The Department anticipates preparing a training for Coronavirus Coordinators next week.

4. Your Public Information Officer (PIO) will receive direction about public dissemination of this information. Please notify your PIO that information will be forthcoming.

These steps are designed to let the public know that, even in the midst of a national emergency, the Department will continue to protect the public from coronavirus-related illegal schemes.

In addition to the above action items, I am also directing the following additional steps relating to coronavirus-related matters:

1. I have designated Adam Braverman and William Hughes from ODAG as the point persons for all coronavirus matters. They will coordinate with the Criminal Division, the Civil Division, the Antitrust Division, the Tax Division, and EOUSA for all issues related to coronavirus schemes. These Divisions will be available to support the Department's efforts to combat unlawful conduct in connection with the coronavirus and shall provide appropriate assistance where necessary in connection with criminal prosecutions and civil actions.
2. All federal law enforcement agencies should coordinate with the USAOs and appropriate Department litigation components as they receive and investigate coronavirus-related complaints.
3. The Department will make additional staffing and resources available to the NCDF as necessary to ensure it is able to effectively intake all incoming coronavirus-related complaints in a timely manner.
4. The Office of Public Affairs shall develop a Department media campaign to raise awareness and visibility of the NCDF hotline and services.

By working together, we will get through this difficult time and continue to protect the public from being victimized by wrongdoers who seek to take advantage of the current pandemic.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters.