



Department of Justice

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Federal Government Warns of Potential Fraud Scams Surrounding COVID-19 Economic Impact Payments

LEXINGTON, Ky. – The United States Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of Kentucky and the Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI) is warning Kentucky taxpayers to be alert about possible scams relating to COVID-19 economic impact payments.

U.S. Attorney Robert M. Duncan, Jr. and Bryant Jackson, Special Agent in Charge of the IRS-CI Cincinnati Field Office, made the announcement today in an effort to prevent taxpayers who are in need from being victimized by criminals, using the recently approved payments as an opportunity to commit a crime.

“I encourage all Kentuckians to remain vigilant and not fall prey to scammers seeking to take advantage of the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 national emergency,” said U.S. Attorney Duncan. “The Federal Government will not contact you by telephone seeking your personal information. Everyone needs to remain alert. If you do get contacted by a scammer, report it immediately to law enforcement.”

“Ruthless criminals will take this opportunity to prey upon our fears in order to try and line their own pockets by stealing your money or your personal information,” said Bryant Jackson, Special Agent in Charge, IRS Criminal Investigation, Cincinnati Field Office.

COVID-19 economic impact payments will be on their way in a matter of weeks. For most Americans, this will be a direct deposit into your bank account. For the unbanked, elderly or other groups we have traditionally seen receive tax refunds via paper check, they will receive their economic impact payment in this manner as well.

Scammers may try to get you to sign over your check to them or use this as an opportunity to get you to “verify” your filing information in order to receive your money, using your personal information at a later date to file false tax returns in an identity theft scheme. Because of this, everyone receiving money from the government from the COVID-19 economic impact payment is at risk.

U.S. Attorney Duncan and Special Agent in Charge Jackson offer the following information and tips to spot a scam and understand how the COVID-19 related economic impact payments will be issued.

- The IRS will deposit your check into the direct deposit account you previously provided on your tax return (or, in the alternative, send you a paper check).
- The IRS will not call and ask you to verify your payment details. Do not give out your bank account, debit account, or PayPal account information - even if someone claims it's necessary to get your check. **It's a scam.**
- If you receive a call, don't engage with scammers or thieves, even if you want to tell them that you know it's a scam, or you think that you can beat them. **Just hang up.**
- If you receive texts or emails claiming that you can get your money faster by sending personal information or clicking on links, delete them. Don't click on any links in those emails.
- Reports are also swirling about bogus checks. If you receive a “check” in the mail now, it's fraud - it will take the Treasury a few weeks to mail those out. If you receive a “check” for an odd amount (especially one with cents), or a check that requires that you verify the check online or by calling a number, **it's fraud.**

Don't become a victim by allowing criminals to exploit your emotions. Stay strong, tell your family, friends and neighbors about these scams.

If you believe you have been a target or victim of a scam or fraud, please report it to the National Center for Disaster Fraud Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via email at disaster@leo.gov

For more information, visit the IRS website at www.irs.gov/coronavirus.

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