

COVID-19 FRAUD BULLETIN

➔ Protect Yourself from Fraud



★ ★ OFFICE of ★ ★
INSPECTOR GENERAL

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

April 2020

In response to the pandemic caused by the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19), Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), which provides the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) with approximately \$12 billion to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 crisis and the ability to waive certain requirements. The Office of Inspector General recognizes that we are facing both uncertain and unprecedented times and is alerting the public about potential fraud schemes related to the CARES Act funding. Dishonest people may approach you with fraudulent offers of assistance during these economically difficult times. Be on the lookout for these common schemes. Note that scam attempts may be made by phone, mail, text, email, social media, or in person.

UNSOLICITED CONTACT FROM HUD

HUD does NOT initiate contact with individuals regarding its assistance or about obtaining assistance. If somebody contacts you, without you contacting them first, and claims to be from HUD or offering HUD assistance, be suspicious. Obtain their contact information and call HUD directly to verify whether they are legitimate or just hang up or delete the email.

UNSOLICITED EVICTION HELP

If somebody contacts you to provide assistance in stopping an eviction for a fee, be suspicious. The CARES Act prevents owners from evicting anyone receiving HUD-assisted housing until July 25, 2020.

FAKE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

If you are contacted by an unfamiliar organization claiming to be a nonprofit or one that has a name very similar to that of a well-known nonprofit, be suspicious. Someone may be reaching out to falsely claim to be helping victims of COVID-19. Provide charitable donations directly to organizations you know or have dealt with before or visit the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) tax exemption site, <https://www.irs.gov/charities-and-nonprofits>, to verify that the new nonprofit is registered with the IRS before donating.

PHISHING ATTEMPTS

If you receive a call or email from someone stating they are from a reputable company or a company with which you may already be doing business asking for passwords or bank or credit card information, be suspicious. You may see a link that looks official but as you hover over it, it shows a different address that is not to the official website. Oftentimes, the individual will make the need for information seem urgent to get you to respond before you realize it is not legitimate. You should go directly to websites or call businesses directly to determine whether they contacted you or need information. Legitimate requests usually will not require you to provide personal information.



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Dos and Don'ts

Do Contact businesses directly rather than responding to emails or calls.

Do Contact your local public housing agency or HUD to speak with a verifiable employee of the agency.

Do Contact your local HUD office to find assistance providers. Find your local office's contact information at HUD's official website, https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/field_policy_mgt/localoffices.

Do Contact the HUD Office of Inspector General Hotline at hotline@hudoig.gov or visit the website at www.hudoig.gov if you are approached or solicited for upfront payments.

Don't Answer online solicitations that require a fee to apply for government assistance.

Don't Pay money to anyone who claims you must pay an upfront fee for assistance from HUD, a public housing agency, or other government relief program.

Don't Respond to correspondence advertising "Special COVID-19" vouchers; these do not exist!

Don't Provide personal information in response to an email or phone call.

