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ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL: BE VIGILANT FOR PHONE, ONLINE SCAMS

Chicago — Attorney General Kwame Raoul today warned Illinois residents to be on alert for phone scams in which callers pose as representatives of law enforcement or public utilities in order to con people into sending money.

Raoul is encouraging Illinois residents to be vigilant of scams in light of recent reports of scammers impersonating representatives of the Social Security Administration, the Illinois State Police (ISP) and public utilities. Raoul also is cautioning people to be aware of similar scams via email, and of romance scams as Valentine's Day approaches.

The recent phone scams involve scammers spoofing phone numbers, causing caller ID devices to display what appears to be a legitimate call from Social Security, the ISP or a utility. Scam artists on the other end of the line claim they are collecting on a phony debt and instruct their targets to make cash or gift card payments, wire transfers, or provide confidential personal information in order to avoid losing benefits, being arrested, or having their utilities shut off.

"It is important that people know a government or law enforcement agency or public utility will not demand money or personal information using threats," Raoul said. "If you receive such a call or message, I encourage you to hang up or delete the correspondence, and contact my office."

In addition to phone scams, Raoul also said the Social Security Administration recently warned people of email scams in which recipients receive emails that include attachments appearing on official letterhead in order to appear more legitimate. Raoul urged people to not open emails claiming to be from Social Security that promise a benefit approval or increase in exchange for information or money.

Raoul's office also encourages people to be vigilant for other electronic scams that include romance scams, in which scammers target victims on dating websites and apps, or through social media sites. The Federal Trade Commission says that romance scams stole more than \$143 million in 2018. The amounts can range from as little as \$5 to more than \$10,000. Online dating scammers often tell their victims that they live far away, sometimes outside of the United States, and need money for travel expenses to see the victim or to pay for medical expenses or other unexpected bills.

Raoul said online dating app users should not send money or gift cards to someone unless they have met in person and can verify that the money will be used for the requested reason. The office also recommends that online dating service users verify the identities of anyone they are talking to by searching their identity online, using a reverse image search to see if their picture is associated with another person and by looking up any story a sweetheart tells them to see if others report the same story was used in a scam.

State agencies will not call or contact taxpayers via the phone unless the taxpayer has made an initial contact. If a consumer receives a call someone purporting to be from a state agency and wants to verify it, they should contact the agency using a phone number on the agency's website. Utility customers should also locate their utility provider's phone number online or on their monthly bill, and call to verify any reported claims.

Raoul encourages residents who need to report a scam to do so on the [Attorney General's website](#) or by calling his Consumer Fraud Hotline (1-800-386-5438 in Chicago, 1-800-243-0618 in Springfield, and 1-800-243-0607 in Carbondale).