

Schuyler County officials warn: Beware phony home repair grant scams from COVID-19 stimulus program.

Watkins Glen, NY (April 3, 2020)—The Schuyler County Office for the Aging and the Schuyler County Attorney’s Office are warning local seniors to look out for potential scams of homeowners arising from the COVID-19 stimulus program, including a new phony home repair grant offer.

“Earlier this week our office was notified by New York Office for the Aging that other counties have been getting calls from older adults who had received a postcard mailing addressed to ‘resident’ from the National Residential Improvement Association (NRIA) offering to help them get a grant to repair their home,” Schuyler County OFA Director Tamre Waite said.

“The postcard looks official, but according to New York State, it is not a government program, and the NRIA currently does not have a valid business license. This is a scam.”

According to Schuyler County Attorney Steven Getman, while there are not yet reports of postcards being sent to Schuyler County residents, the county intends to be proactive, given state and national reports of scams following the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic.

“Government grant scams are on the rise,” Getman said. “With the recently passed federal stimulus bill, scammers are taking advantage of homeowners of all ages by making bogus offers to secure generous grants for home repairs.”

Waite and Getman are warning residents to look out for:

- Unsolicited phone calls or emails from someone claiming to be an official from the Federal Grants Administration (which does not exist), or a nonprofit organization like the National Residential Improvement Association offering grants or funding for repairs.
- Social media messages or posts from people excited to share the thousands of dollars they claim to have received from an organization that secures grants for homeowners.
- Callers who ask you to pay a fee in order to receive a grant. Federal grants never charge for grant applications.
- Magazine or newspaper ads that offer “free grants.”
- Calls or emails that claim you’re eligible for a personal grant that does not restrict how you spend the money.

“The important thing with any scam is to protect yourself,” Waite said.

“There are simple steps that residents can take to guard against scams,” Getman noted, offering the following:

- Do not answer your telephone if you do not recognize the caller or number.
- Never share personal information over the telephone, like your Medicare number, Social Security number or banking information.
- Never pay a fee to a company that says it will help you get a grant.
- Block or unfriend anyone who offers unsolicited grant information on social media. Even if you are “friends” with that person – they may have been hacked.
- Only use local contractors with validated references to do work in your home.

According to Waite and Getman, if you have been a victim of a scam, you can contact your local law enforcement agency or any of the following:

- The New York State Attorney General's Office: 800-771-7755
- The National Center for Disaster Fraud Hotline: 866-720-5721
- The AARP Fraud Watch Network: 877-908-3360

The Schuyler County Office for the Aging was established as a result of the Older Americans Act of 1965 with the core function being provision of information, referrals and services for county residents age 60 and over, as well as their caregivers.

The Schuyler County Attorney is the legal advisor for county government, including the Office for Aging, Department of Social Services Adult Protective Unit and other county agencies serving the senior population.