

Department of Justice launches elder fraud reporting hotline

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U.S. Attorney Billy J. Williams joined Attorney General William P. Barr, FBI Director Christopher A. Wray, and Chief Postal Inspector Gary R. Barksdale on Tuesday announced the largest coordinated sweep of elder fraud cases in history.

“Americans are fed up with the constant barrage of scams that maliciously target the elderly and other vulnerable citizens,” said Attorney General William P. Barr. “This year, the Department of Justice prosecuted more than 400 defendants, whose schemes totaled more than a billion dollars. I want to thank the men and women of the Department’s Consumer Protection Branch, which coordinated this effort, and all those in the U.S. Attorneys’ Offices and Criminal Division who worked tirelessly to bring these cases. The Department is committed to stopping the full range of criminal activities that exploit America’s seniors.”

Attorney General Barr also announced the launch of a National Elder Fraud Hotline, which will provide services to seniors who may be victims of financial fraud.

This year, prosecutors charged more than 400 defendants, far surpassing the 260 defendants charged in cases as part of last year’s sweep. In each case, offenders allegedly engaged in financial schemes that targeted or largely affected seniors. In total, the charged elder fraud schemes caused alleged losses of over a billion dollars.

Elder abuse is a serious crime against some of our nation’s most vulnerable citizens, affecting nearly 10% of older Americans every year. Together with our federal, state, local, and tribal partners, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Oregon is steadfastly committed to combatting all forms of elder abuse and financial exploitation through enforcement actions, training and resources, victim services, and public awareness.

“Victims of all ages lose billions of dollars annually to fraud schemes and the elderly fall victim to these schemes at far greater rates than the rest of the population. We all need to be vigilant in protecting our own finances, but we also need to watch out for our elderly friends and love ones. Intercede when you learn that a friend or family member is contemplating sending money to someone who has contacted them by telephone or online. Your vigilance will make a difference,” said U.S. Attorney Williams. “Federal law enforcement will continue to do everything we can to stop these bad actors before they can victimize more Americans.”

The Hotline will be staffed by experienced case managers who can provide personalized support to callers. Case managers will assist callers with reporting the suspected fraud to relevant agencies and by providing resources and referrals to other appropriate services as needed.

When applicable, case managers will complete a complaint form with the Federal Bureau of Investigation Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) for Internet-facilitated crimes and submit a consumer complaint to the Federal Trade Commission on behalf of the caller. The Hotline’s toll free number is 833-FRAUD-11 (833-372-8311).

For the second year, the Department of Justice and its law enforcement partners also took comprehensive action against the money mule network that facilitates foreign-based elder fraud.

Generally, perpetrators use a “money mule” to transfer fraud proceeds from a victim to ringleaders of fraud schemes who often reside in other countries. Some of these money mules act unwittingly, and intervention can effectively end their involvement in the fraud. The FBI and the Postal Inspection Service took action against over 600 alleged money mules nationwide by conducting interviews, issuing warning letters, and bringing civil and criminal cases.

Agents and prosecutors in more than 85 federal districts participated in this effort to halt the money flow from victim to fraudster. These actions against money mules were in addition to the criminal and civil cases announced as part of this year’s elder fraud sweep.

These outreach efforts have helped to prevent seniors from falling prey to scams and have frustrated offenders’ efforts to obtain even more money from vulnerable elders.