



Department of Justice

United States Attorney Scott W. Brady
Western District of Pennsylvania

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

APRIL 3, 2020

WWW.JUSTICE.GOV/USAO/PAW

U.S. Attorney's Office, IRS-Criminal Investigation Warn of Potential Fraud Scams Surrounding COVID-19 Economic Impact Payments

PITTSBURGH - The United States Attorney's Office and the Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI) warned western Pennsylvania taxpayers today to be alert about possible scams relating to COVID-19 Economic Impact Payments.

U.S. Attorney Scott W. Brady and Michael Montanez, Acting Special Agent in Charge of IRS-CI Philadelphia Field Office, offer the advice today in an effort to prevent taxpayers from being victimized by criminals using the recently approved federal payments as an opportunity to commit a crime.

Taxpayers should be extra vigilant for unsolicited phone calls or emails concerning their economic impact payments. The IRS will **not** call or email you about your payment.

"With the COVID-19 Economic Impact Payments due to be sent out soon, we want all Americans to be on high alert for fraudsters," said U.S. Attorney Brady. "These charlatans will try every trick in the book to try to steal your money. If you sense you are being deceived, hang up, exit the email, slam your door and contact us right away!"

Citizens who suspect fraud can reach the U.S. Attorney's Office at:

- Western Pennsylvania COVID-19 Fraud Task Force's Toll Free Hotline:
1-888-C19-WDPA or **1-888-219-9372**
- Western Pennsylvania COVID-19 Fraud Task Force's email address:
usapaw.covid19@usdoj.gov

"Unfortunately there are fraudsters out there who will attempt to victimize vulnerable people during these trying times", said IRS-CI Acting SAC Montanez. "Everyone should be wary of swindlers trying to steal their COVID-19 Economic Impact Payment, as well as crooked individuals trying to take advantage of the crisis by tricking people into unnecessarily turning over their personal, sensitive information. All Americans should be cautious in this regard and it is asked that everyone also be on the lookout for the interests of the elderly and other susceptible family members and friends."

Anyone with information about fraud in this area or any other tax related fraud is asked to please contact IRS-CI at PhiladelphiaFieldOffice@ci.irs.gov.

The Treasury Department and the IRS announced that distribution of Economic Impact Payments will begin in the next three weeks and will be distributed automatically. Most individuals do not need to take any action. The IRS will calculate and automatically send payment to those eligible. For most Americans, this will be a direct deposit into your bank account. For those without a bank account, the elderly or other groups that have traditionally received tax refunds via paper check, they will continue to receive payments in that manner.

U.S. Attorney Brady and SAC Montanez offer the following information and tips to spot a scam and understand how the COVID-19 related Economic Impact Payments will be issued:

First, every American should know that the IRS will **NOT** contact you to request your banking information, will **NOT** ask you to confirm personal information to send or expedite your Economic Impact Payment, and will **NOT** require you to pay a fee.

Most IRS impersonation scams try to trick taxpayers into thinking these are official communications from the IRS, tax industry professionals or tax software companies. We expect to see a surge of these scams when fraudsters find a new opportunity— like the stimulus checks being sent.

Here are things to watch out for and tips to protect yourself and your loved ones from these scams:

- The IRS will deposit your economic impact payment into the direct deposit account you previously provide 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 is necessary to get your economic impact payment. If you receive a call, do not engage with scammers or thieves. Just hang up!
- Scam emails ask taxpayers about a wide range of topics – related to refunds, filing status, ordering transcripts, and verifying PIN information – in order to steal your personal information or file tax returns. When people click on links from these emails, their computers are infected with malware designed to steal their files or record their keystrokes. Don't get scammed. These emails are not from the IRS!
- We are starting to see reports of bogus stimulus checks. If you receive a “check” in the mail now, it's **fraud** – it will take the Treasury Department a few weeks to distribute the payments. 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.
- The IRS will **NOT** ask you to send money before it will issue your Economic Impact Payment. If someone asks you to send money to get your payment, do not send money. If you receive texts or emails claiming that you can get your money faster by sending personal information or clicking on links, don't respond or click the links! Report them right away.

Don't be a victim! Education is the best way to avoid being defrauded by scammers. For more information, visit the IRS website at www.irs.gov/coronavirus.

###