



For Immediate Release

April 6, 2020

Contact: Lloyd P. LaFountain, III
Superintendent
Bureau of Financial Institutions
207-624-8570

Maine Financial Institutions Superintendent warns consumers of financial scams related to the anticipated direct payments from the U.S. Government under the CARES Act.

GARDINER – Superintendent of the Maine Bureau of Financial Institutions Lloyd LaFountain is warning consumers of an expected surge in scam attempts involving the anticipated direct payment to individuals under the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act or the CARES Act. The new law, enacted by Congress on March 27, 2020, is intended to provide financial relief to all Americans to help alleviate the negative economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Individuals can expect to receive a direct payment from the federal government in amounts up to \$1,200 beginning in the next few weeks.

“Unfortunately, scammers will very likely try to exploit the program to engage in ID theft and to defraud innocent people of their payments. Everyone is reminded to remain vigilant during the current crisis and be wary of any requests for personal information,” remarked LaFountain.

The Treasury Department and the Internal Revenue Service have announced that distribution of economic impact payments will begin in the next three weeks and will be distributed automatically, with no action required for most people. The IRS indicates that Social Security beneficiaries who are not typically required to file tax returns will not need to file to receive a payment. Instead, payments will be automatically deposited into their bank accounts. However, some people who typically do not file returns will need to submit a simple tax return to receive the economic impact payment. Details on how to obtain the payments will be posted on the IRS website. The Superintendent urges Mainers to go to www.irs.gov for their information.

Consumers should be on the lookout for mailings, emails, phone calls, and other communications from fraudsters claiming to provide consumers quick access to economic impact payments. You should never provide personal account information or other personal information in response to an unsolicited e-mail, text, or call. Government agencies, financial institutions, and other legitimate organizations do not request personal account information in such a manner.

To protect your money and prevent identity theft remember:

- Do not click on links in an email or text message unless you are confident it is not a scam. Clicking the link itself may expose your personal information to scammers and harmful software.

- Never provide personal account information or other personal information in response to an e-mail, text, or call. A bank or credit union does not request personal account information in such a manner.
- Ignore threatening calls about warrants for arrest for unpaid taxes. The IRS does not collect taxes in this manner.
- Learn to spot suspicious links in emails. Check the “From” header in any email received – if the name of the author of the email does not match the author’s email address in the header, this is a sign of a scam. Also, hover your computer cursor over a link in your email without clicking the link itself. By doing this, the address for the link will appear on your screen. If it is different from the address the email purports to come from (a bank, or government organization), this is a sign of a scam.

Scammers are using the health crisis to steal money in other ways, even posing as volunteers requesting donations for disaster relief organizations. If you wish to make a donation to a charity, contact the charity directly and inquire about the best way to help. The Governor’s Office provides an excellent resource for Mainers looking to donate or volunteer:

<http://www.maine.gov/governor/mills/covid-19/maine-helps>

The Bureau of Financial Institutions has a consumer library with helpful information about how consumers can spot and avoid financial scams. Also, the Bureau’s Consumer Outreach Specialist is available to answer any consumer questions related to financial scams or accounts in general. The Bureau’s phone number is 207-624-8570. The website is www.maine.gov/pfr/financialinstitutions/index.shtml.

###