

BONA FIDE CHARITY – YES OR NO

Trap

Bernard in Delray Beach was receiving calls and mail seeking donations in support of many causes such as providing for firefighters/police officers families, fighting diseases, protecting the environment and saving animals. All sounded like worthy causes, but he felt pressured by some of the callers and did not want to contribute if his money was not going to actually reach the person or organization in need of his help. How can he know if the organization is a legitimate charity?

Tips

If you are solicited by telephone (or mail) you should ask questions, never give payment information over the phone, always request answers in writing, and research the charity yourself BEFORE contributing.

- Will your donation be tax deductible? Does the charity have a 501(c)(3) tax status? Not all “charities” are eligible to receive tax-deductible contributions. Go to <http://www.irs.gov/app/pub-78> to check their tax status.
- All charities soliciting in Florida, excluding religious, educational and governmental entities, are required to register and file financial information with the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Call 1-800-435-7352 or check the Gift Givers Guide at <http://www.800helpfla.com/>.
- Some warning signs of charity scams include asking for donations in cash, using high pressure tactics, using a name that closely resembles that of a better known reputable charity, asking for credit card information before you agree to contribute and offering to send a runner to pick up your money. (Be wary of appeals that tug at your heart strings, especially those involving patriotism and current events.)
- Ask for a written copy of the annual report and financial information that includes a breakdown of how the money is spent and what percentage goes for fundraising versus administrative costs.

For more information, call Palm Beach County Consumer Affairs at 561-712-6600 (Boca/Delray residents call 1-888-852-7362 toll free)