Elder Consumer Protection Program

The Elder Consumer Protection Program at Stetson University College of Law’s Center for Excellence in Elder Law is an educational and information resource on general and legal matters regarding elder consumer protection and awareness. The program, which is supported by state funding, offers assorted materials and various services that provide and promote general knowledge, public awareness and assistance, and professional development and training.

The information contained herein is intended only as a brief overview on matters of general interest. It is not offered as legal advice, is not a definite statement of law, and is not a complete analysis of the area of law.

The applicability of law to a particular matter requires an exhaustive examination of the specific facts with the appropriate laws. If you have a specific legal issue or legal concern, you should always consult with an attorney for detailed legal advice.

ELDER CONSUMER PROTECTION PROGRAM
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As the taxpayer, it is your legal responsibility to file your tax return, as well as pay any taxes, fees, penalties or interest.

Unscrupulous scammers are aware of this and will use it to their advantage for financial gain.

The most popular ways scammers target consumers during tax season are:

- IRS Impersonation Frauds and Scams
- Tax Preparer Frauds and Scams
- Tax Season Identity Theft

Can you identify signs of potential fraud?

Be Aware of Potential Fraud:

**Unsolicited telephone calls or e-mails**

The IRS generally does not communicate via unsolicited telephone calls or e-mails. Whether by telephone, by e-mail, or by hoax web links, unsolicited communications appearing from the IRS may actually be scammers seeking to obtain personal or financial information.

**Tax preparers who don't sign the return**

Although you are always ultimately legally responsible, a tax preparer should always sign the return to confirm and validate their work.

**Preparation fees or instant tax return loans based on return amount**

Tax preparation fees should be based on the financial complexity of your taxes. If fees are based on the amount of the return, the preparer may apply inapplicable credits or deductions to unjustly inflate the fee. Also, instant loans are often loaded with hidden fees and high interest rates.

**Tax Return Identity Theft**

Someone uses a legitimate taxpayer's stolen identity to fraudulently file a forged tax return and claim a refund.

Be Proactive to Protect Yourself

- Be suspicious of unsolicited telephone or e-mail requests claiming to be tax related.
- Avoid preparers who base fees or costs on the amount or a percentage of the refund.
- Use a tax preparer with a current IRS Preparer Tax Identification Number and who signs to verify the return in addition to you.
- Be prepared and able to prove any and all claimed credits and deductions.
- Diligently guard personal information and regularly check your annual credit report.

**Resources**

Better Business Bureau
- By telephone: 1-703-276-0100
- Online: [www.bbb.org](http://www.bbb.org)

Internal Revenue Service:
- By telephone: 1-800-829-1040

Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration:
- By telephone: 1-800-366-4484
- Online: [www.tigta.gov](http://www.tigta.gov)