

Charitable Giving and Charities:

What to know before you donate

Most charitable organizations are legitimate and use donations wisely. However, some charities are either phony, or spend most of the money they receive from donors on administrative expenses or more fundraising. Since the Attorney General's Office does not register charities, our office does not keep records on the amount of money a charity spends on fundraising and administrative expenses compared to the amount of money a charity spends on programs and services.

There are some independent organizations that have compiled financial information on charities, especially charities that conduct nationwide solicitation campaigns. The Attorney General's Office has included links to such organizations. Before making a contribution to a charity, especially a national charity, you should consider contacting the following organizations:

BBB Wise Giving Alliance

4200 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 800
Arlington, VA 22203
(703) 276-0100
www.bbb.org/charity

American Institute of Philanthropy

P.O. Box 578460
Chicago, IL 60657
(773) 529-2300
www.charitywatch.org

Charity Navigator

1200 MacArthur Boulevard
Mahwah, NJ 07430
(201) 818-1288
www.charitynavigator.org

GuideStar

4801 Courthouse Street, Suite 220
Williamsburg, VA 23188
(757) 229-4631
www.guidestar.org

Military Relief Societies

www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil

The Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University

550 West North Street, Suite 301
Indianapolis, IN 46202
Phone: (317) 274-4200
www.philanthropy.iupui.edu/

Public safety organizations

You may be solicited to contribute to an organization claiming to represent police officers or firefighters. Many of these organizations use professional solicitors to solicit on their behalf. You should be aware that having the words “police,” “law enforcement,” “trooper,” or “firefighter” in an organization’s name does not necessarily mean your local police officers or firefighters belong to or are represented by the organization. Any donations received from these type of solicitations normally go to a police or firefighter association, such as a union or other fraternal organization, and not to a police or fire department. If a caller tells you a local police or fire department has authorized a solicitation on their behalf or will somehow benefit from the solicitation, you should call your local police or fire department to determine whether they have authorized a solicitation on their behalf.

Helpful tips for charitable giving

Always pay by check, not by cash. Always make contributions by check and make the check payable to the charitable organization, not to the solicitor. Beware of solicitors who want to send couriers to your home to pick up your donation. Indiana law does not allow solicitors to collect or attempt to collect a contribution in person or by courier unless the solicitation is made in person and the collection or attempt to collect is made at the time of the solicitation; or the contributor has agreed to purchase goods or items in connection with the solicitation, and the collection or attempt to collect is made at the time of delivery of the goods or items.

Don’t be pressured into making a contribution. Ask the caller for written information on the charitable organization, including the charity’s name, address, and telephone number. A professional solicitor or charity should be willing to send you materials outlining the charity’s purpose and how your donation will be used. You should check out the charity with some of the independent organizations that provide information on charities.

Watch out for charities with similar sounding names. Some charitable organizations use names that are very similar to those of respected organizations. You should check with some of the independent organizations that provide information on charities to make sure you are donating to the correct charity.

Beware of callers who claim endorsement by the state. Under Indiana law, a person who solicits charitable contributions may not use the fact of registration as an endorsement by the State of Indiana.

Be suspicious if a caller thanks you for making a pledge that you didn’t make. If you have any doubt about whether you made a pledge, check your records. Beware of invoices claiming you’ve made a pledge when you know you have not.

You can cancel a pledge prior to making a contribution. Under Indiana law, a contributor has the right to cancel a pledge for monetary contributions at any time prior to making the contribution.

Resources

These organizations are equipped to deal with questions and complaints regarding charitable giving:

- Philanthropic Research, Inc. (also known as Guidestar, www.guidestar.org) – provides financial information and other records on thousands of local and national charities, including copies of tax forms the charities have submitted to the Internal Revenue Service.
- BBB Wise Giving Alliance (www.give.org) – provides evaluations of hundreds of charities who solicit nationally or internationally.

The Consumer Protection Division of the Indiana Attorney General’s Office works to safeguard the rights of Indiana citizens every day. If you have questions or complaints regarding charitable giving and charities, or other appropriate consumer issues, contact the Attorney General’s Consumer Protection Division using the address and phone number listed below, or visit www.in.gov/attorneygeneral for more information.



**Office of the Indiana Attorney General
Consumer Protection Division**

*To file a complaint call 1.800.382.5516
or visit www.IndianaConsumer.com*