

4 Ways to Make Your Charitable Donations Count

No sooner than the Thanksgiving leftovers are put away, requests for “end of year” donations start to appear in your mail and email, in person, over the phone, on social networking sites, and through your mobile devices. If you want to express your thankfulness with a gift to a charity, find an organization that spends wisely on a cause you support, and screen out any requests scammers send your way.

When you get a request for a donation:

Double-check the group’s name to see if it’s legitimate. Scammers often use names that look or sound like reputable organizations and hope you won’t catch it. Ask the caller for the charity’s legal name, address and telephone number and compare that information with what you find independently through an internet or phone book search.

Find out if the solicitor is a paid fundraiser for the charity. Paid fundraisers often receive a large percentage of donations. To maximize the impact of your gift, send your donation directly to the charity instead of going through the fundraiser.

Make sure the charity is registered. In Maryland, charities must register with the Office of the Secretary of State before asking for donations. The Secretary of State’s website - <http://www.sos.state.md.us/Charity/RegisterCharity.aspx> - allows you to see if a charity is registered and provides links to other sites that will assist you in making your donation decisions.

Be wary of high pressure tactics and requests for cash. Scammers will say anything to get you to send money before you can research the so-called charity or think over your donation. Scammers may also ask you to send cash or pre-paid cards, or wire money so there’s no way for you to trace where the money goes or get it back.

**For more information or to obtain this factsheet in an alternative format, contact:
Howard County Office of Consumer Protection at 410-313-6420 (voice/relay) or
consumer@howardcountymd.gov**