

THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of Columbia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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United States Attorney for the District of Columbia Timothy J. Shea Announces Launch of Metropolitan Area COVID-19 Anti-Fraud Task Force

The pandemic outbreak of COVID-19 poses an unprecedented threat to the public health and economic security of the District of Columbia and this country. Unfortunately, some have chosen to profit from public panic by exploiting vulnerable citizens—like the sick and elderly—and to take advantage of vital public institutions combatting the pandemic—including hospitals, urgent care providers, and emergency response agencies. The pandemic is dangerous enough without abusive scams and manipulations that prey on fear and undermine the heroic efforts of nurses, doctors, and others serving on the front lines of the public health crisis. Such conduct cannot be tolerated.

That is why the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia is spearheading the formation of the **Washington Metropolitan Area COVID-19 Anti-Fraud Task Force**, a coalition of local and federal law enforcement agencies, Inspectors General, and the Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia. The Task Force is committed to detecting, interfering with, and deterring fraud, price-gouging, hoarding schemes, and other wrongdoing aimed at capitalizing on the public health emergency. This collaboration will afford law enforcement the opportunity to communicate on investigative leads, leverage investigative resources, and deploy all available tools to address the threat, including criminal investigations and prosecutions and civil enforcement actions.

In announcing the formation of the Task Force, U.S. Attorney Timothy J. Shea stated, "The challenges posed by the spread of COVID-19 threaten the safety and security of the District of Columbia and our nation. We will not allow anyone to take advantage of our citizens during this public health emergency. We are committed to detecting, investigating, disrupting, and prosecuting these fraudsters and will devote whatever time, energy, and resources are necessary to do so. This Task Force is the centerpiece of this effort. I am grateful to our law enforcement partners, including Attorney General Racine and our federal partners throughout the Metropolitan Area for joining in this initiative. It is the least we can do to support the efforts of the front-line heroes combatting this crisis—nurses, doctors, emergency responders, and public health officials—who put their lives on the line each day."

The U.S. Attorney's Office is pleased to announce that the following agencies are part of the Task Force:

- District of Columbia, Office of the Attorney General
- District of Columbia, Department of Insurance, Securities and Banking
- District of Columbia, Enforcement & Consumer Protection Division
- District of Columbia, Office of Inspector General
- Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington Field Office
- Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigation, Washington Field Office
- Homeland Security Investigations, Washington Field Office
- Metropolitan Police Department, District of Columbia
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Office of Inspector General
- Pension Benefits Guaranty Corporation, Office of Inspector General
- United States Agency for International Development, Office of Inspector General
- United States Army Criminal Investigation Division, Washington-Metro Fraud Resident Agency
- United States General Services Administration, Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations, Mid-Atlantic Division
- United States Department of Defense, Defense Criminal Investigative Service, Washington, D.C. Resident Agency
- United States Department of Homeland Security, Office of the Inspector General, Major Frauds & Corruption Unit
- United States Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, Washington Regional Office
- United States Department of Transportation, Office of Inspector General
- United States Department of Treasury, Inspector General for Tax Administration
- United States Department of Treasury, Office of Inspector General
- United States Drug Enforcement Administration, Washington Division Office
- United States Postal Inspection Service
- United States Postal Service, Office of the Inspector General
- United States Secret Service, Washington Field Office
- United States Securities and Exchange Commission, Office of Inspector General
- United States Small Business Administration, Office of Inspector General
- Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, Office of the Inspector General

The Task Force will work to identify scams aimed at exploiting fears and spreading disinformation about the pandemic. So far, law enforcement in the District of Columbia and throughout the country have received reports of individuals and businesses using the internet to sell fake cures for COVID-19, market products falsely claiming to mitigate COVID-19, and fraudulently retail COVID-19 supplies, such as face masks and hand sanitizer. There are also reports of suppliers hoarding vital supplies, such as personal protective equipment (PPE), and attempting to sell it at inflated prices. There also are reports of phishing emails from entities posing as the World Health Organization or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and reports of malware being inserted onto mobile apps designed to track the spread of the virus. Collaborating through the Task Force will position local and federal agencies to rapidly investigate such reports and put a stop to wrongdoing.

As part of this launch, the U.S. Attorney's Office has already provided training via teleconference to local and federal law enforcement partners on criminal and civil enforcement measures available to combat COVID-19 fraud schemes, created a Pandemic Fraud Hotline through which citizens can report suspected scams via phone or email, released multiple consumer advisories, and begun to share investigative leads.

These steps are in line with the U.S. Attorney General's direction to prioritize the detection, investigation, and prosecution of all criminal conduct related to the current pandemic. The Task Force will work in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Justice's broader federal effort to address price gouging and hoarding schemes through the COVID-19 Anti-Hoarding and Anti-Price Gouging Task Force led by the U.S. Attorney for the District of New Jersey.

Citizens and others who suspect fraud or other criminal wrongdoing related to the pandemic should report it to the COVID-19 Pandemic Fraud Hotline by phone at 202-252-7022 or by email at USADC.COVID19@usoj.gov. District of Columbia residents can also submit complaints of suspected scams to the Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia by calling its Consumer Protection Hotline at 202-442-9828 or by emailing Consumer.Protection@dc.gov.

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