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Consumer Affairs Offers Tips to Spot Online Dating Scams **Tech Advancements Provide New Opportunities for Con Artists**

NASHVILLE –The Tennessee Department of Commerce & Insurance's (TDCI) Division of Consumer Affairs encourages consumers to stay diligent to avoid scams associated with online dating.

Online dating has experienced drastic growth, increasing the use of dating websites and mobile applications. Technological advancements have streamlined communication, giving scammers powerful new tools of deceit that Tennessee consumers need to be able to recognize.

The following are some warning signs that might indicate an online dating scam:

- The individual wants to leave the dating site immediately and use personal e-mail or IM accounts.
- The individual claims instant feelings of love.
- The individual claims to be from the United States but currently overseas.
- The individual claims he or she is planning to visit but is unable to do so because of a tragic event.
- The individual asks for money to pay for travel, visas or other travel documents, medication, a child or other relative's hospital bills, recovery from a temporary financial setback, or expenses while a big business deal comes through.
- The individual makes multiple requests for more money.

Carefully consider these tips when dating online:

- **Research the website or mobile application thoroughly.** Request the guidelines the company follows in screening its applicants. Does the service conduct a criminal background check for each person? Also, ask friends about their experiences with online dating sites.
- **Take the time to research your matches.** If any red flags are raised in your communication with someone, check his or her name on an internet search engine and on social media. You can also take a part of the suspicious email and copy and

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- paste it into a search engine to see if it has been associated with any other scams.
- **Never send anyone money.** Often times, once scammers will share a story of financial difficulty. Never send money to someone you have not met in person. It is difficult to get money back from someone who may be misrepresenting themselves once it has been sent.
 - **Use caution with those who want to take your conversation off the dating site immediately.** Many times scammers will attempt to lure you off the dating site to continue communication using personal email accounts.
 - **Read the signs.** Be cautious of individuals who claim to have fallen instantly in love, or who say they are traveling or working overseas. Beware of people who prey on emotions by claiming to be trapped in a foreign country or involved in an emergency, and needing you to send them money. This is a red flag for a “catfishing” scam.
 - **Meet in person.** If it’s possible, ask to meet in person, maybe to a group outing and always in a safe, public place. If the individual offers various excuses or refuses to meet, this may be a sign they are not who they say they are.
 - **Know how to “break up” with a dating site.** Many online dating sites automatically renew memberships. Read the contract in detail and send written cancellation notice to avoid being billed again.

Report online dating scams to:

- The dating website. Most dating websites offer customer service, safety tips, and a way to report the scam. Reporting directly to the website allows them the opportunity to filter out the scammers to encourage an enjoyable experience for users overall.
- The Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Internet Crime Complaint Center at www.ic3.gov
- The Federal Trade Commission at www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov
- The Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs at www.tn.gov/consumer

For more consumer tips, visit www.tn.gov/consumer.

About the Tennessee Department of Commerce & Insurance: *TDCI is charged with protecting the interests of consumers while providing fair, efficient oversight and a level field of competition for a broad array of industries and professionals doing business in Tennessee. Our divisions include the Athletic Commission, Consumer Affairs, Tennessee Corrections Institute, Emergency Communications Board, Fire Prevention, Insurance, Tennessee Law Enforcement Training Academy, Peace Officers Standards and Training, Regulatory Boards, Securities, and TennCare Oversight.*

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