




FRAUDULENT RENTAL HOUSING LISTING ADVISORY

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For Immediate Release

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VENTURA, California – District Attorney Gregory D. Totten warned today that county residents should be vigilant when using online listing services to secure rental housing. Such services do not typically verify that the person advertising a property is actually authorized to list the property for rent. This creates an opportunity for criminals to prey upon unsuspecting victims.

Because of the ease of listing properties online on sites such as Craigslist.org, scams are difficult to detect. An online rental scam can be orchestrated from anywhere in the world. Therefore, the District Attorney recommends the following tips to avoid becoming a victim of this type of fraud:

- Arrange to meet with the owner or agent to inspect the property prior to paying any money. If the “owner” is out of town or otherwise “unavailable” to show the property, or states the property may not be shown, you should strongly consider looking for another rental property.
- Be wary of advertisements offering a property at below market rent or at a significant discount.
- Do not pay for rent or a security deposit with cash or via a wire transfer. Credit cards may offer some protection in the event of fraud.
- Whenever possible, deliver your payment to an open and established business and avoid sending money through the mail. Request a signed lease agreement and keys to a rental property in exchange for your initial payment.
- Obtain identification from and make note of whomever is claiming to have the authority to rent out the property.
- Be wary of people who claim to be a real estate or rental agent but provide a business card without a valid California Bureau of Real Estate (BRE) license number.

- Use websites that have visible customer feedback, ratings on landlords, and a reputation for secured transactions.
- To prevent your identity from being stolen, do not provide a social security number, driver's license number, or bank account number until you have verified the person renting a property is authorized to do so.
- If a property is advertised by someone claiming to be a real estate agent, verify their credentials at the California Bureau of Real Estate website. (www.dre.ca.gov)
- If the listing is being advertised by a property management company, such companies are also licensed by the California Bureau of Real Estate and their credentials should be verified at the California Bureau of Real Estate website. (www.dre.ca.gov)
- The best practice is to work with a licensed real estate agent or property manager to find legitimate rental properties. If an agent fails to perform due diligence and a consumer loses money as a result, the consumer may contact the California Bureau of Real Estate and may be able to seek restitution.

Victims and property owners, or agents working on their behalf, who locate an unauthorized property being offered for rent online are encouraged to immediately submit a report to the District Attorney's Real Estate Fraud Unit via the following email address: rentalscam@ventura.org. Please only report suspicious properties advertised in Ventura County.

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