


GREGORY D. TOTTEN
District Attorney

NEWS RELEASE

www.vcdistrictattorney.com

Twitter: [@VenturaDAO](https://twitter.com/VenturaDAO)

Contact: Anthony Wold
Title: Senior Deputy District Attorney
Telephone: (805) 662-1735
E-mail: Tony.Wold@ventura.org

Approved: CMT 
Date: Monday, July 13, 2020
Release No.: 20-061

COVID-19 Rental Scam Warning

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 listing a property for rent is actually authorized to do so. This creates an opportunity for criminals to prey upon unsuspecting victims. These fraudsters seek to exploit housing anxiety amid the COVID-19 pandemic as residents face uncertainty regarding the length of temporary mortgage forbearance accommodations.

Because of the ease of listing a property for rent on the internet using websites 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 during the ongoing pandemic:

- 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, look 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 security deposits with cash or using an online wire transfer.
- Whenever possible, deliver your payment to an open and established business and avoid sending money through the mail. Demand a signed lease agreement, receipt, 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 Department of Real Estate (DRE) license number.
- Use websites that have visible and current 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 actually authorized to do so.
- If a property is advertised by someone claiming to be a real estate agent, verify their credentials at the California Department of Real Estate website. (www.dre.ca.gov)
- If the rental listing is being advertised by a property management company, such companies are also licensed by the California Department of Real Estate and their credentials should be verified at the California Department 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 available rental properties. If an agent fails to perform due diligence and a consumer loses money as a result, the consumer may contact the California Department 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.

Victims who have been scammed by a fraudulent online rental listing for a property located in Ventura County are also encouraged to submit a real estate fraud complaint form, available on the District Attorney's website at: <http://www.vcdistrictattorney.com/publications/>.

###

The Ventura County District Attorney's Office is the public prosecutor for the county's 850,000 residents. The office employs approximately 280 employees including attorneys, investigators, victim advocates, and other professional support staff who strive to seek justice, ensure public safety, and protect the rights of crime victims.

Follow the Ventura County District Attorney's Office on Twitter [@VenturaDAO](https://twitter.com/VenturaDAO)