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THE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
JUSTICE NEWS

Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, March 4, 2021

Justice Department Warns About Fake Unemployment Benefit Websites

The Department of Justice has received reports that fraudsters are creating websites mimicking unemployment benefit websites, including state workforce agency (SWA) websites, for the purpose of unlawfully capturing consumers' personal information.

To lure consumers to these fake websites, fraudsters send spam text messages and emails purporting to be from an SWA and containing a link. The fake websites are designed to trick consumers into thinking they are applying for unemployment benefits and disclosing personally identifiable information and other sensitive data. That information can then be used by fraudsters to commit identity theft.

Unless from a known and verified source, consumers should never click on links in text messages or emails claiming to be from an SWA offering the opportunity to apply for unemployment insurance benefits. Instead, anyone needing to apply for unemployment benefits should go to an official SWA website, a list of which can be found at: <https://www.careeronestop.org/localhelp/unemploymentbenefits/unemployment-benefits.aspx>.

Schemes that use links embedded in unsolicited text messages and emails in attempts to obtain personally identifiable information are commonly referred to as phishing schemes. Phishing messages may look like they come from government agencies, financial institutions, shipping companies, and social media companies, among many others. Carefully examine any message purporting to be from a company and do not click on a link in an unsolicited email or text message. Remember that companies generally do not contact you to ask for your username or password. When in doubt, contact the entity purportedly sending you the message, but do not rely on any contact information in the potentially fraudulent message.

If you receive a text message or email claiming to be from an SWA and containing a link or other contact information, please report the communication to the National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) by calling 866-720-5721 or using the NCDF Web Complaint Form found at: www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud.

If you believe you may have entered information into a fraudulent website, resources on how to protect your information can be found at: www.identitytheft.gov.

To learn more about identifying and protecting yourself from phishing attempts, go to: <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/how-recognize-and-avoid-phishing-scams> or <https://www.fbi.gov/scams-and-safety/common-scams-and-crimes/spoofing-and-phishing>.

Further information about the SWA-imposter scheme, and other major scams targeting American consumers, can be found at the Justice Department's Transnational Elder Fraud Strike Force website: <https://www.justice.gov/civil/consumer-protection-branch/transnational-elder-fraud-strike-force>.

This alert is provided by the Justice Department's National Unemployment Insurance Fraud Task Force (NUIFTF) and the Consumer Protection Branch of the department's Civil Division. Members of NUIFTF include: Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, U.S. Secret Service, Homeland Security Investigations, IRS-Criminal Investigation, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Social Security Administration Office of Inspector General, and FDIC Office of Inspector General.

Find out more about the NUIFTF at: <https://www.justice.gov/file/1319301/download>.

For more information about the Consumer Protection Branch, visit <http://www.justice.gov/civil/consumer-protection-branch>.

Topic(s):

Consumer Protection

Component(s):

Civil Division

Press Release Number:

21-200

Updated March 4, 2021