



PRESS RELEASE

Settlement Announced In Case Against Maryland Police Charity Founded by Retired Baltimore City Police Officer

BALTIMORE, MD (May 2, 2019) - Maryland Attorney General Brian E. Frosh and Secretary of State John C. Wobensmith today announced a settlement with CopStress, Inc., a 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization and its founder, Richard A. Willard, a retired Baltimore City Police Officer. Anne Arundel County Circuit Court Judge Ronald A. Silkworth approved the consent order requiring CopStress, Inc. and Willard to cease all charitable soliciting and to turn over remaining donations to an organization whose mission matches charitable solicitations at issue in the case.

According to the complaint, beginning on July 2017 and continuing through 2018, Willard and the charity misled the public by claiming to operate programs for police officers such as police academy training, rapid response teams, and licensed counseling for police suffering from post traumatic stress disorder. The complaint further alleges Willard posed as an active duty officer to solicit donations and misled the public about affiliation or sponsorship of a CopStress, Inc. fundraising event by the Baltimore City Police Department.

“Willard operated a sham charity that exploited a worthy cause - support for our police and law enforcement,” said Attorney General Frosh. “Shutting him and his charity down safeguards Maryland consumers from another unlawful fundraising scam and clears a path for legitimate law enforcement charities to succeed.”

The investigation revealed that CopStress also did not operate the myriad of programs and services it claimed to provide police officers. The charity ignored several requests of the Secretary of State’s Office to register and document its finances and claimed charitable programming. As a result, on December 23, 2017, the Secretary of State issued a Cease and Desist Order citing multiple violations of the Maryland Solicitations Act. Despite the order, the charity continued to solicit donations for its “Baltimore Brothers in Blue Bash.” The event was ultimately called off after the event planners learned about the State’s Cease and Desist Order prohibiting the charity from fundraising. The Attorney General filed suit on April 10, 2018 to restrain further violations and seek civil penalties.

“Charities that mislead the public about how donations are used have no place in Maryland,” said Secretary of State John C. Wobensmith. “Donors should be wary of any charity not willing or able to answer basic questions about its finances and charitable programming.”

In addition to permanent bans on charitable soliciting, the consent order announced today includes a monetary judgment of \$30,000 in civil penalties. Collection of the penalties are suspended as long as Willard and CopStress follow the terms of the order.

The Secretary of State registers and regulates charitable organizations and their professional solicitors who operate in Maryland. Together with the assistance of the Maryland Attorney General, the Secretary of State enforces Maryland's charitable giving laws to ensure that donations are used for their intended purpose. Maryland donors may visit <http://sos.maryland.gov/Charity/Pages/Giving-Wisely.aspx> on the Secretary of State's website for tips on how to give wisely to charities.

Individuals who may have been a victim of deceptive or illegal charitable solicitations, may call the Charities and Legal Services Division, Secretary of State's Office at [410-974-5521](tel:410-974-5521) or [1-800-825-4510](tel:1-800-825-4510). <http://sos.maryland.gov/Charity/Pages/Report-A-Charity.aspx>