



CONSUMER ALERT: Marylanders Should Be Wary of Deceptive Online Sports Betting Companies and Scams

BALTIMORE, MD (May 17, 2024) – Preakness Weekend 2024 has arrived and Attorney General Anthony Brown is urging Marylanders again to be aware of deceptive online sports betting companies. This alert was issued to all consumers who have subscribed to receive consumer information from our office. Consumers can subscribe to this list here: <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/MDAG/subscriber/new>.

The online sports betting industry, which launched in Maryland in 2022, also operates through mobile apps, has enticed bettors with aggressive marketing, such as so-called “risk-free” bets. Enticements and complicated “deals” may end up costing consumers more money than they were planning to spend in the first place. Online gambling is also a target for cybercriminals looking to defraud unsuspecting bettors.

In Maryland, the only legal wagering on sporting events is through sports wagering operators that are licensed and regulated by the Maryland Lottery and Gaming Control Agency (MLGCA) (www.mdgaming.com/maryland-sports-wagering/). Marylanders can also legally participate in online fantasy sports competitions that are offered by fantasy competition operators who are registered with the MLGCA (www.mdgaming.com/ancillary-responsibilities/fantasy-competitions/).

Attorney General Brown offers the following tips to protect consumers from misleading information peddled by online sports betting platforms:

- Learn what other users are saying about the platform: Check consumer reviews and ratings with the Better Business Bureau (www.BBB.org). The BBB complaints are often detailed and include responses from the platforms.
- Read the fine print! Especially on all promotions and bonus money.
 - With respect to “risk-free” bets, for example, those funds may only be credited back to the consumer to use again with the platform, not as a refund of the money the consumer initially invested.

- Platforms sometimes require users to gamble their own money before accessing any bonus they advertised.
- Some platforms may restrict the games for which consumers can use promotional money or have additional restrictions that are only listed in the fine print.
- Read all the conditions placed by the platform that may limit how and when bettors are able to cash out their winnings, or if the sportsbook will penalize bettors – such as freezing accounts –for certain activities and strategies the bettor may use on their platform to increase their chances of winning.
- Remember that there is no such thing as a completely risk-free bet, or free money, when it comes to gambling, despite what may be implied by an ad.

To protect against fraudulent platforms and scammers looking to steal money and financial and personal information, consumers should follow these tips:

- The internet is flooded with fraudulent sports betting websites. Make sure that you are using the official websites of established sportsbooks that have been approved by Maryland's Lottery and Gaming Control Agency.
- Ignore online gambling pop-up ads and unsolicited emails, text messages, or social media messages. Even if these look like they are coming from a legitimate sportsbook, they could be linking you to a fraudulent website instead.
- Report suspected scams to our Consumer Protection Division at 410-528-8662, or the Federal Bureau of Investigation at <https://tips.fbi.gov/>.

Remember that gambling causes financial losses and should only be done in moderation. Maryland residents seeking help with a gambling problem are encouraged to call 1-800-GAMBLER, a free and confidential helpline that is available 24 hours a day and is staffed by peer counselors and professionals from the Maryland Center of Excellence on Problem Gambling, a division of the State of Maryland's Behavioral Health Administration. Additional information on problem gambling resources is available by visiting www.mdgamblinghelp.org.

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<https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/press/2024/051724CA.pdf>