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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Consumer Alert: Beware of Scam Targeting Owners of Lost Pets in Maryland

Baltimore, MD (March 16, 2025) – Attorney General Anthony G. Brown issued today a consumer alert urging Maryland residents to be vigilant following reports of a scam preying on individuals seeking to reunite with lost pets. Scammers are exploiting the distress of pet owners by impersonating employees from reputable animal shelters, including the Baltimore Animal Rescue and Care Shelter (BARCS), the Maryland SPCA, and Talbot Humane.

How the Scam Works

Scammers identify pet owners through lost pet advertisements on social media platforms. Using caller ID spoofing technology, they make it appear as though the call is coming from a legitimate shelter. The caller claims to have found the missing pet, often stating that the animal is injured and requires immediate medical attention. They then demand payment via money transfer applications such as Zelle, Cash App, Venmo, or PayPal, threatening that the pet will not receive care unless the payment is made promptly.

In one reported incident, a pet owner was convinced to transfer \$2,600 to the scammer before realizing it was a fraud. Some individuals became suspicious when the scammers failed to provide verifiable information, such as the pet's microchip number or photographic evidence of the animal's condition. These red flags helped prevent more individuals from being scammed.

Shelter Policies

Shelters generally do not request payments over the phone or through money transfer apps. BARCS, for example, has stated that they never solicit payments via phone and encourages individuals to report any suspicious calls to their official email, info@BARCS.org.

Consumer Protection Recommendations

To protect yourself from this scam:

- **Do Not Send Money:** Avoid transferring funds via money transfer apps to individuals claiming to represent a shelter.

- **Verify the Caller:** If you receive a call from someone claiming to have found your pet, ask for specific details about your animal that only someone with the pet would know.
- **Contact the Shelter Directly:** Reach out to the shelter through official channels to confirm any information.
- **Report Suspicious Activity:** If you believe you have been targeted by this scam, report the incident to the Maryland Office of the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC).

For more information or to report a scam, contact the Maryland Office of the Attorney General at 410-528-8662 or visit www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov.

Spread the Word

Please share this alert with friends, family, and local community groups to help protect others from becoming a victim of this scam.

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>.

This alert is based on information provided by local nonprofit organizations and news outlets.

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<https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/press/2025/051625a.pdf>