



Better Business Bureau Senior Awareness Initiative

Consumer Alert

Give Wisely During the Holidays – and Every Day

Many donors who gave to the Buckeye Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America recently were horrified to discover that their money did not actually go to this organization. Richard Cordray, Ohio's Attorney General, is working with Buckeye Chapter PVA to warn consumers about individuals soliciting donations in the name of the charity. The scammers are believed to be former employees of Benefit Systems of America, a company that previously solicited donations for Buckeye Chapter PVA but is no longer in operation.

Consumers are reminded more strongly of the need to give during the holidays, but individuals and organizations can take advantage of consumers' generosity. BBB encourages consumers to give, but also warns them to check out a charity before making donations.

The BBB evaluates charitable organizations against 20 Standards that look at governance and oversight, measuring effectiveness, financial health, and fundraising practices. Enclosed is a copy of the BBB Standards for Charity Accountability and a list of organizations that have been evaluated in relation to the BBB's Standards.

Additionally, the BBB offers these tips:

- Check the charity's report with the BBB. Call (216) 241-7678 or go to www.cleveland.bbb.org.
- Ask for a copy of the charity's IRS Determination letter. Make sure it says that they are 501(c)(3) tax-exempt.
- Check with the Ohio Attorney General's office to make sure an organization is registered to solicit donations in the state of Ohio. You can call toll free at (800) 282-0515.
- Ask the charity for a copy of their annual report. It should contain information about the organization's mission, programs, board, and financial health.
- Make checks out to an organizations full name. Do not abbreviate and do not make checks out to an individual or to cash.
- Do not be pressured to give immediately. A charity will be happy to receive your contribution at any time.
- For more information on wise giving, go to the BBB's website, www.cleveland.bbb.org/give-wisely.

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The BBB Foundation thanks Dominion East Ohio Gas and many generous BBB Accredited Businesses for their support of the Senior Awareness Initiative