

March 27, 2020

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Attorney General Steve Marshall Announces Partnership with Facebook to Combat Price Gouging During Pandemic

(MONTGOMERY) – Attorney General Steve Marshall announced today a partnership with Facebook to combat unconscionable online price gouging of Alabamians during the current pandemic. The partnership is the first announcement by Attorney General Marshall in his effort to enlist the nation’s largest technology companies to stem the tide of price gouging of consumers seeking to protect themselves from the COVID-19 virus.

“There is no question that unscrupulous operators are trying to take advantage of Alabamians looking to buy basic necessities to protect and sustain themselves and their families during the ongoing coronavirus epidemic,” said Attorney General Marshall. “What’s more, much of that illegal activity is centered online because many consumers find it easier to purchase supplies on the internet due to lack of local availability or self-quarantining. As my office seeks ways to protect our consumers, I am pleased to announce that Facebook is one of several major e-commerce platforms to respond to my call to participate in a coordinated effort to identify and shutdown online price gouging.”

Facebook has pledged to work directly with the Alabama Attorney General’s Office to review and remove, as necessary, potential price gouging listings and advertisements from its site. Facebook has already committed to take proactive steps to fight price gouging and deception, including banning advertising or sale of medical masks, hand sanitizer, surface disinfecting wipes and COVID-19 testing kits, as well as prohibiting products that imply a cure or claim to prevent people from contracting the virus.

"Facebook truly appreciates Attorney General Marshall’s work to combat price gouging online," said Will Castleberry, VP, State and Local Public Policy for Facebook. "Facebook is focused on preventing exploitation of this crisis for financial gain and will continue working closely with attorneys general to remove violating content."

Attorney General Marshall [announced](#) that Alabama’s price gouging law is now in effect with the issuance of a State Public Health Emergency by Governor Kay Ivey on March 13. Although what constitutes an unconscionable price is not specifically set forth in state law, a price that is 25 percent or more above the average price charged in the same area within the last 30 days – unless the increase can be attributed to a reasonable cost in connection with the rental or sale of the commodity – is a prima facie case of unconscionable pricing.

The penalty is a fine of up to \$1,000 per violation, and those determined to have willfully and continuously violated this law may be prohibited from doing business in Alabama.

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Alabamians who want to file an illegal price gouging report are encouraged to do so via the Alabama Attorney General's Consumer Interest Division web link: <https://www.alabamaag.gov/consumercomplaint>, or by calling 1-800-392-5658 to receive a form by mail to complete and return.

Attorney General Marshall will soon announce more partnerships with other technology companies who have also agreed to work with his office to combat price gouging.