

## NEWS RELEASE

# Luther Strange

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## AG LUTHER STRANGE WARNS AGAINST HOLIDAY SCAMS

(MONTGOMERY) – Attorney General Luther Strange wishes Alabamians safe and happy holidays, urging them to take precautions against scams and other potential dangers. Unfortunately, this also is a time when unscrupulous people might take advantage of others’ generous and joyful spirits. The Attorney General offers the following tips and reminders to protect consumers during this special time.

### Scammers Posing as Family or Friends Needing Help

During this time of heavy travel, some scammers may contact you by phone or email posing as a family member who is away from home and in need of money. They might tell you they’ve lost their wallet, or experienced some kind of emergency in order to deceive you. The scammers will instruct you to wire cash or provide them with a prepaid card number. As a general rule you should never send money to anyone if you cannot verify their identity. If you are unsure, check the whereabouts of the person reportedly needing assistance with other family members. Additionally, ask the person calling or emailing to verify details that only family would know, such as location of last family gathering, where they went to high school or college, etc.

### Fake Charity Scams

The Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday season is also a popular time for fake charity scams. These scammers often use phishing emails, spoofed telephone numbers or door-to-door visits. Scammers may act as if they are working for an established charity or may even create a fake charity. Be safe and directly contact the charity of your choice and donate to them instead. If you suspect a door-to-door solicitor isn’t honest, contact your local law enforcement agency. The following online data is available to assist with verifying charities: Consumers may go to the Internal Revenue Service at <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/search-for-charities> to look up tax exempt organizations, and may also use the Better Business Bureau’s [www.give.org](http://www.give.org) for more information.

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### **Holiday Gift Card Scam**

Unfortunately, Christmas gift cards can also be manipulated by thieves. Scammers sometimes rub off the security codes from gift cards while they are still on store shelves and wait until they think the gift card has been sold and activated. They will then spend the money, leaving the recipient with no money left on the card. To avoid this scam, make sure the gift card you are buying is intact before you buy it. Compare it to other gift cards of the same variety. Be sure to keep your gift card receipt.

### **Buyer Beware**

Beware of websites that feature pop-up advertising promising a hard-to-find item or items at a too-good-to-be-true price. Always remember, if an online offer seems too good to be true, then it probably is.

### **Holiday Shopping Safety Tips**

Lastly, shoppers should be extra vigilant this time of year for crimes of opportunity. It is always best to keep the following in mind:

- Always park in a well-lit area.
- Do not leave your purse, presents, or other purchases in plain view in your vehicle.
- Do not leave your purse unattended in your shopping cart.
- If possible, always shop with a friend or family member. There is safety in numbers.
- If meeting someone to purchase something bought online, such as from Craigslist or Facebook, meet in a heavily trafficked and well-lit area. If possible, meet in the parking lot of your local police department or sheriff's office.

"The best protection against scams and crimes of opportunity is not to be caught by surprise by scammers and thieves," said Attorney General Strange. "Use your judgment and take time to verify questionable contacts. Look for the signs of a scam: They contact you, ask for your personal information and demand that you pay them by wire or prepaid card to collect a prize or pay a supposed debt. Be wary and don't be afraid to demand proof. Don't be a victim of consumer fraud."

To report suspected consumer fraud, Alabamians can call the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Hotline at **1-800-392-5658**. You can also visit the Attorney General's website at [www.ago.alabama.gov](http://www.ago.alabama.gov) and click on "Consumer Protection." To file an on-line complaint, use the link: <http://www.ago.alabama.gov/Page-Consumer-Protection-File-a-Complaint-01>.