

What Donors Need to Know

Often callers soliciting contributions are not volunteers, but professional fund raisers. These paid telemarketers are required to identify themselves as such under the charities law. In all cases, you should ask the caller how much of every dollar raised goes to the charity.

Never be afraid to ask for information in writing. If asked, the professional charity telemarketer must immediately inform you how much money actually goes to the charity and how much is paid to the telemarketer. Additionally, this information must be confirmed in writing by the telemarketer within 14 days of your inquiry.

You are entitled to the truth about where your money goes.

What Charities Need to Know

All charitable organizations are required by Mississippi law to register with the Secretary of State's Office and renew their registration annually. Certain types of organizations are exempt from registration; they must, however, file a one time notice of exemption with the Secretary of State's Office and make updates when there are changes to the required information.

If an organization is a nonprofit corporation, it must also file its formation document with the Filing Service Unit of the Business Services Division.

More information is available by calling the Secretary of State's Office at (601) 359-1599 or (888) 236-6167.

A searchable listing of all charities registered with the Secretary of State's Office is available online at www.sos.ms.gov.

Donor Alerts

- **Beware of Sweepstakes**

Some charities use mail solicitations containing a sweepstakes entry form. These often represent the existence of a "guaranteed prize." The odds of winning such a sweepstakes, however, are extremely low. Before responding, you should always read the fine print of any such sweepstakes solicitation.

It is unlawful for any organization to state you must buy merchandise or make a payment or contribution in order to win a prize or to improve your chances of winning.

- **Beware of Home or Office Pick-ups**

Never allow a "representative" of the organization to come to your home or office to pick up a contribution. You do not know the person or their background.

If you have made the decision to support the organization, it is preferable to write a check rather than give cash. Mail the check to the organization at the address provided.

- **Beware of Tax Consequences**

Not all non-profits are charities. If you want to make a charitable contribution and claim the donation for federal income tax purposes, first make sure the organization is tax exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

A list of charities which are registered in Mississippi but have not applied for 501(c)(3) status is available at www.sos.ms.gov in the most recent Report on Charitable Organizations.

Supporting Charities

*Making Your
Contribution Count*



Michael Watson
SECRETARY OF STATE

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(601) 359-1599
www.sos.ms.gov

Investigate Before You Give

- **Know Your Charity**

Ask questions before giving. Legitimate charities do not mind providing information. If you would like more information, you are entitled to request it be sent to you in writing.

- **Resist Pressure Tactics**

Don't give in to pressure or to organizations using "scare" tactics. You are never under any obligation to give and you do not have to give immediately. Take time to evaluate the purposes of the group.

- **Watch for "Same Names"**

Many charities have similar names. Be very sure you know which organization is asking for your donation. Some scam artists intentionally use names resembling those of respected groups.

- **Get Information**

Find out how much of your contribution actually goes toward assistance. Some charities spend almost all contributions on solicitation expenses or administrative expenses.

The Secretary of State's Office publishes an annual report providing a summary of the financial information of each registered charity in Mississippi. The report, which shows how much is spent for charitable purposes and how much for fundraising and administrative costs, is available online at www.sos.ms.gov.

- **Be Wary of Phone Calls**

Get the name of the person calling and the exact name of the charity. Do not hesitate to ask for written information before contributing. Find out if the caller is a professional fund raiser and, if so, how much of your donation goes to the fundraising and how much actually goes to the charity.

- **Verify Mail Solicitations**

Be aware of unsolicited mail including novelty items that you can keep "if you contribute." Federal law states you may keep any item without contributing, unless you had previously requested it be sent to you.

- **Always Get Receipts**

Be sure to always get a receipt for your donation, especially for cash gifts. Receipts are important for tax deductions and also provide a tracking mechanism for donations.

- **Volunteer Cautiously**

Check out charities asking you to solicit contributions on their behalf. Essentially, they are asking you to donate your credibility to their cause. Remember, your neighbors and friends trust you to know the organization. Make sure you do.

*The Secretary of State's Office publishes an annual report providing a summary of the financial information from every registered charity in Mississippi. The **Report on Charitable Organizations** is prepared each year to inform Mississippians about how their contributions and other funds are being used and to assist donors in making informed decisions when contributing to charitable organizations. **View the report at www.sos.ms.gov.***

Contact the Mississippi Secretary of State's Office at (601) 359-1599 or (888) 236-6167 for more information about charities and to check for complaints or ongoing investigations.