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ATTORNEY GENERAL WARNS CONSUMERS TO BEWARE OF "MYSTERY SHOPPER" SCAM

Las Vegas, NV-- Attorney General Catherine Cortez Masto today issued the following consumer advisory with important information concerning a recent rash of complaints involving solicitations to participate in a "mystery" or "secret" shopper program.

The scam artists play on the public's general knowledge of "mystery" or "secret" shopper programs that are utilized by major companies to evaluate the operations of their retailers, and they flood the internet and offline media with recruitment ads. In some cases, recruitment is also done through unsolicited mailings. The ads offer consumers the opportunity to earn hundreds of dollars per week by acting as a shopper, and the follow-up mailings include official-looking instructions and an authentic-looking business or cashier's check for several thousand dollars. The check is supposed to cover the costs of completing the shopper program tasks and providing the consumer with his or her training pay.

"Unfortunately for the unsuspecting consumers who respond to the mystery shopper program advertising, the check they will receive is a fake, and the opportunity they believe will earn them extra pay is a scam," warns Nevada Attorney General Catherine Cortez Masto. "Most scammers ask an intended victim to 'evaluate' a money transfer service as part of the program, by requiring the consumer to wire funds as directed. If the consumer follows these instructions, the check he or she deposited will bounce, so the consumer will lose at least the amount of the check, and more if the bank imposes a fee."

The scam works by taking advantage of the time delay between when the check is deposited and when the bank discovers it is counterfeit. In some cases, due to the quality of the "fake" check, it can take up to two weeks for a bank to make the determination and remove the funds already credited to its customer's account as a courtesy.

Although there are many scams involving bogus mystery shopper opportunities, there are legitimate opportunities available as well. Consumers who are interested in such programs should keep the following tips in mind:

- Legitimate mystery shopping programs will never promise fast cash or ask you to cash a check and wire any funds to an address unknown to you.
- Be skeptical of any mystery shopping promoters who charge a fee for access to the program.
- The Mystery Shopping Program Association (MSPA) website at www.mysteryshop.org has information on how to register to be a mystery shopper with a MSPA-member company and other valuable information about the industry to help ensure the program is legitimate and right for you.

Consumers who have received or fallen victim to a mystery shopper scam solicitation may contact the Attorney General's Bureau of Consumer Protection at (702) 486-3194 in Las Vegas or (775) 684-1180 in Carson City. A complaint form, as well as other valuable consumer protection information, is also available on the Attorney General's website at www.ag.state.nv.us.

For other valuable consumer protection information, please visit the Bureau of Consumer Protection website, www.ag.state.nv.us/org/bcp/education.htm and/or the State of Nevada's general fraud information website, www.fightfraud.nv.gov

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