

August 18, 2021

*****CONSUMER ALERT*****

ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL URGES ILLINOIS RESIDENTS TO BE AWARE OF COMED SCAM INVOLVING CRYPTOCURRENCY PAYMENTS

Chicago — Attorney General Kwame Raoul is warning Illinois residents to be on the lookout for a scam in which thieves claim to be affiliated with ComEd in order to scare people into making wrongful cash or bitcoin payments that are nearly impossible to recover.

According to the Attorney General's office, scammers are contacting Illinois residents in order to elicit cash or cryptocurrency payments, and Raoul is cautioning people against responding to such calls or messages. The scam involves a caller, purportedly from ComEd, threatening to shut off the call recipient's electricity unless a payment for a supposed past-due bill is received immediately. Callers instruct people to remit payment so that it will be received as soon as possible, frequently via bitcoin, a type of cryptocurrency. Scammers direct individuals to nearby bitcoin ATMs, which buy or sell bitcoins for cash. Instead of inserting a debit card to withdraw cash, people insert cash and have bitcoins sent to a bitcoin wallet. Raoul is warning people that bitcoin delivery is instant, and consumers who make such payments to a ComEd imposter's bitcoin wallet have almost no way to recover the money.

"Scammers are demanding cryptocurrency because it is immediate and irreversible – by the time you make the transfer, it is too late," Raoul said. "It is imperative that people avoid becoming a victim by being aware that ComEd will not collect payments at kiosks that issue cryptocurrency. If you receive one of these messages, hang up and report the communication to my office."

Cryptocurrency is a type of digital currency that generally only exists electronically and is exchanged online using a phone or computer without going through an intermediary such as a bank. The absence of an intermediary means that there is no entity to address problems during transactions or prevent fraud. Cryptocurrencies typically do not have procedures to help consumers dispute transactions, and cryptocurrency payments do not come with the legal protections that accompany credit and debit cards. Once someone makes a payment with cryptocurrency, it can usually only be recovered if the recipient returns the payment.

The rate of cryptocurrency scams has skyrocketed during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Federal Trade Commission, Americans reported nearly 3,500 imposter scams involving cryptocurrency between Oct. 1, 2020 through March 31, 2021, totaling \$64 million in reported losses. Cryptocurrency transactions are largely irreversible because cryptocurrency transactions are difficult to trace, which makes locating and identifying scammers impossible.

According to Attorney General Raoul, the following should serve as red flags of a ComEd or other utility scam:

- The agent tells you your electricity service will be disconnected. ComEd will never disconnect services through a phone call. Illinois law requires utilities to provide written notice, including instructions for contacting the utility to avoid disconnection, at least 10 days before your electricity can be disconnected.
- The agent tries to sell you electricity or a utility plan.
- The agent requests immediate payment.

- The agent requests payment via a prepaid cash card, wire transfer, gift card, or cryptocurrency such as bitcoin. ComEd does not accept payments made using prepaid cash cards, cryptocurrency such as bitcoin, or mobile payment apps.
- The agent requests your account number or other personal information, such as a Social Security number or tax identification number.
- The agent asks to review your energy bill or confirm its details over the phone.

Raoul is also reminding people that scam artists can spoof phone numbers and websites, so it is important to use caution when receiving suspicious or unexpected calls. Raoul encourages people to be aware of the following:

- ComEd and other utility companies may offer payment plans or assistance with billing, which consumers can [learn about online](#).
- Additionally, consumers who need assistance with utility payments may be eligible for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). The LIHEAP application period is Sept. 1, 2021 to May 31, 2022, or until funding is exhausted. Raoul encourages people to call the Illinois LIHEAP Hotline at 1-877-411-9276 or visit the [Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's website](#) to determine eligibility or to find an agency that can help with applications.
- If you receive a suspicious or unexpected call or text message from a ComEd billing agent and **you have unpaid bills, stop what you are doing and call ComEd** immediately at 1-800-EDISON-1 (1-800-334-7661) to verify whether ComEd or your utility company was attempting to reach you.
- If you receive a suspicious or unexpected call or text message from ComEd or other utility company and you **know that you do not have any unpaid bills, report the call** by calling Attorney General Raoul's Consumer Fraud hotlines:

1-800-386-5438 (Chicago)
1-800-243-0618 (Springfield)
1-800-243-0607 (Carbondale)