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AG Schimel: Cyber Security is Critical for Wisconsin Seniors

MADISON, Wis. – Attorney General Brad Schimel is reminding Wisconsin’s older adults to protect themselves from online attacks and scams during National Cyber Security Awareness Month.

“One in eighteen older adults who live independently in the community fall prey to financial fraud and scams each year,”¹ said Attorney General Schimel. “As the aging population grows and more seniors get online, criminals will double down in their attempts to exploit this vulnerable population. Prevention is critical to avoid becoming a victim of financial exploitation and we must remain vigilant in educating our state’s seniors about common scams.”

According to a Pew Research Center study, older adults over the age of 65 have been the fastest growing population to get online since 2000.² That same population is expected to surge in Wisconsin in the coming decades with an increase of 640,000 adults 65 and older – an increase of 72%.³

Attorney General Schimel is providing the following tips for older adults to stay safe online:

- Create passwords that are 12 characters or longer. You can utilize a paraphrase or sentence that you can remember with a mix of letters, numbers and symbols.

¹ *American Journal on Public Health*, 2017 Aug; 107(8):1295

² *Americans’ Internet Access: 2000-2015*, Pew Research Center

<http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/06/26/americans-internet-access-2000-2015/>

³ *Wisconsin Department of Health Services*

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/dementia/demographics.htm>

- Vary your passwords and store them in a safely secured place that is away from your computer station or devices.
- Make sure all your devices including phones and tablets are password protected and locked. These devices can be stolen and utilized to extract personal information if not properly secured.
- Never click on links in emails that you cannot verify are from a legitimate source. This is a common type of scam known as phishing, where scammers extract personal information from you. If you are in doubt it is best to delete or ignore the item.
- Be wary of urgent messages that require immediate action. For example, a message that tells you that you owe the government money or your computer needs repairs. Criminals often try to misrepresent that they are a legitimate source like the Internal Revenue Service or a well-known business.
- Pay close attention to privacy settings on social media and be aware of what you share online including sensitive personal information that can be utilized by criminals to exploit you.
- Educate yourself and friends about potential scams by receiving a free copy of the [Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection's Senior Guide](#).

Attorney General Schimel launched a Task Force on Elder Abuse which met for the first time on October 9, 2017. Part of the mission of the task force is strengthening cross-system efforts to investigate, prosecute, and prevent financial exploitation of Wisconsin seniors.

Individuals that suspect they are or know a victim of financial exploitation, should [contact their county elder adult-at-risk agency](#). Those that witness an act that requires immediate attention should call 911.