

## Fundraising for law enforcement and firefighter groups

Most citizens hold law enforcement and public safety personnel in high regard, and are willing to do what they can to support them. This sense of loyalty may lead you to donate to groups which align themselves with causes related to police or fire fighters.

Solicitations, calls, and mailings from groups claiming to have an affiliation with police or fire fighters should be looked at carefully. These solicitations may have very little to do with local police or fire organizations.

### **Professional fundraisers**

Most calls for police and fire fighter groups are not made by local officers, even though this is what you may assume or be led to believe. Solicitors are usually professional fundraisers, who may or may not be calling on behalf of a local public safety agency. People in Wisconsin have reported being contacted by law enforcement and firefighter labor unions. When a labor union collects money, it is divided between the professional fundraiser and the labor union, not the local public safety agency.

Local public safety agencies are already funded by tax dollars.

Even if a group claims to be affiliated with a local organization, this does not necessarily indicate that much of the money will benefit the local public safety agency.

Other groups are for-profit companies which adopt a name that sounds as if it is associated with law enforcement or firefighters, but none of the funds go to any such groups or causes. This can include companies that publish law enforcement or firefighting journals who call businesses asking them to buy advertising space. Some of these companies have been known to send invoices for advertising, even though the business did not agree to place an ad.

### **How much do they get?**

Another important fact you should know before making a decision to donate, buy a ticket, or pay for advertising is to find out what percentage of the money collected actually goes to the local public safety agency. Professional fundraisers can legally keep 75 percent or more

of the money collected. This means that a public safety agency can end up with as little as 10 percent or less of the donated funds. This is due to the high costs sometimes associated with fundraising campaigns. There is also U.S. Supreme Court ruling stating that it is illegal to regulate the portion of contributions a fundraiser may take. Unfortunately, this means that local police or fire agencies can become victims along with individual consumers or businesses which give money to professional fundraisers.

Professional fundraisers typically raise more money than a local public safety agency can raise on its own. Therefore, some public safety agencies do enter into contracts with professional fundraisers in order to be guaranteed a certain amount of money. The public safety agency may be willing to settle for 10 percent of the money the fundraiser actually collects. You may think it is quite an accomplishment when \$56,000 is raised for your local police or fire department, but may become disgruntled to find that \$560,000

was actually collected from people in your community.

## Check your investment

In deciding whether to support a fundraiser who calls on behalf of a law enforcement or public safety agency, ask the following questions:

- Where is the organization located?
- Is the caller being paid or calling as a volunteer?
- What percentage of your donation will actually go to the local public safety agency?
- What will the public safety agency do with the money you are donating?

When asking these questions, listen for any hesitation or uncertainty in the caller. Be suspicious if the caller is unable or unwilling to provide this basic information.

## Is it registered?

All charities not exempted by law which are soliciting in Wisconsin must be registered with the state Department of Financial Institutions. Charities that comply with Wisconsin's charitable solicitations law must disclose the true name of the charity, its actual location, and its primary purpose.

Contact the Department of Financial Institutions to verify a charity is registered at (608) 267-1711 or online at <http://www.wdfi.org>.

Additional information about charities can also be obtained through the Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance at (703) 276-0100.

For more information or to file a complaint, visit our website or contact the Bureau of Consumer Protection.

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