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Center for Consumer Protection Monthly

March 2020

Consumer Chief of the Month: Anne Infinger, Georgia



I have been a lawyer for thirty-nine years, the first twenty in the private sector and the last nineteen with the State of Georgia. After graduating from the University of South Carolina School of Law, I spent twenty years as a business litigator, the first three with a firm in Dallas, Texas and the next seventeen with a law firm in Atlanta. While I was in private practice, I represented a business that was being investigated by the Governor's Office of Consumer Protection, (which is now the Georgia Department of Law's Consumer Protection Division). During the course of that representation, I became familiar with the office and the Fair Business Practices Act. When I subsequently learned that the office had an opening, I applied for the position, first becoming General Counsel for the Agency and then Deputy Director. In July 2015, the agency was moved from the Governor's Office to its more natural place under the Attorney General.

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Article of the Month The Future of Consumer Protection Is Online

By Chris Curtis and Ryan Kriger

Many Vermonters still buy their produce at the local farmer's market or put a premium on "buying local" from friends and neighbors who live in their communities. Business deals involve a handshake and relationships can span generations. Vermont's Consumer Protection Act (CPA) is well suited to regulate these kinds of transactions. But in an era of rapid technological advancement where commerce has overwhelmingly moved online, our laws must keep pace. Now consumers seek the ease of shopping at home, comparing prices with the push of a button and expecting delivery to their doorstep. And with each online transaction, companies are learning about consumers. They amass troves of data, some of which reduce friction in the marketplace and help consumers, and some of which is packaged up and sold and re-sold in the data broker marketplace.



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A note from the NAGTRI Center for Consumer Protection (CCP) to our readers: NAAG and the CCP are working to provide information to our members and the public about what attorneys general are doing across the country related to coronavirus and consumer protection. [ConsumerResources.org](#), our public-facing consumer protection website, is being updated regularly with COVID-19-related information from attorneys general offices including enforcement actions, cease and desist letters, consumer alerts, and press releases. It also has links to state price gouging statutes. If you have information that you think would be useful for the public or the attorney general community, please send it to CCP Director, Abby Stempson, at astempson@naag.org or Todd Leatherman, CCP Program Counsel at tleatherman@naag.org. Thank you for the work you are doing to protect consumers in this trying time.

Scam Alert:

[Mandatory COVID-19 Test Texts Are A Scam](#)



Federal Consumer Protection News

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau:

- The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (Bureau) [filed](#) a lawsuit in federal district court in the Northern District of Illinois against Fifth Third Bank, N.A. (Fifth Third). The Bureau alleges that for several years Fifth Third, without consumers' knowledge or consent: opened deposit and credit-card accounts in consumers' names, transferred funds from consumers' existing accounts to new, improperly opened accounts, enrolled consumers in unauthorized online-banking services, and activated unauthorized lines of credit on consumers' accounts.
- The CFPB released several [resources](#) to help consumers take steps to protect their finances during the coronavirus pandemic, including how to avoid financial scams and submit complaints to the Bureau.
- The CFPB issued its [annual report](#) to Congress about enforcement activities related to the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act, which is enforced by the Bureau and the FTC. The report was issued following input from the staff of the FTC [summarizing](#) its enforcement activities.

Federal Trade Commission:

- A group of affiliate marketers who lured consumers into a business coaching and investment scheme known as My Online Business Education (MOBE) will surrender millions of dollars in assets to [settle](#) FTC charges. According to complaints filed by the FTC, the defendants made millions of dollars in commissions by enticing thousands of consumers to pay as much as \$60,000 for MOBE "mentoring" services, using false claims and misleading testimonials about how much money they could make. The defendants advertised on social media, YouTube, online news sites, and at live events, specifically targeting teenagers, students, and older consumers. The named defendants in the FTC's case against the affiliate marketers are Michael Giannulis and Michael Williams, along with several corporate entities they control, as well as Stephen Bransfield, Gar Leong Chow, and Scott Zuckman and their companies.
- The FTC is mailing 4,976 refund checks and sending 44,136 PayPal payments totaling over \$2 million to consumers allegedly defrauded by American Immigration Center. [According to the FTC](#), starting in 2010, the company falsely implied that its websites were affiliated with the U.S. government to sell immigration form preparation services to consumers, many of whom were trying to reach the actual government site to renew their green cards or apply for naturalization. The FTC alleged that consumers often did not realize that they were not on a government website until they had already paid the defendants \$120 to \$300.
- Under a [settlement with the FTC](#), the marketers of an electrical nerve stimulation device called Quell have agreed to pay at least \$4 million and stop making deceptive claims that the device treats pain throughout the body when placed below the knee and is clinically proven and cleared by the Food and Drug Administration to do so. The FTC [announced](#) that the order settling the FTC's allegations bars the marketers of Quell from making such pain-relief claims unless they are true, not misleading, and supported by competent and reliable scientific evidence; prohibits misrepresentations about clinical proof or the scope of FDA clearance for any device; and requires them to pay redress.
- The FTC announced a public [workshop](#) in Washington, D.C. on May 13, 2020, seeking research, testimony, and other input on the proposed changes to the Safeguards Rule under the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act. The Safeguards Rule requires financial institutions to develop, implement, and maintain a comprehensive information security program. The workshop will explore some of the issues raised in response to amendments to the Rule proposed by the FTC. In 2019, the FTC issued a notice [seeking comments](#) to the Rule, and comments may be submitted on identified topics until June 12, 2020.
- Three defendants in a student loan debt relief scheme have been [banned](#) from telemarketing and selling debt relief and ordered to pay millions in resolution of FTC allegations that they deceived consumers by promising to reduce or eliminate consumers' student loan debt. The U.S. District Court for the Central District of California [found](#) that Brian Colombana, Impetus Enterprise, Inc., and Fig Tree & Co., LLC deceptively marketed student loan debt relief services to consumers and tricked them into paying illegal upfront fees by promising to reduce or eliminate their student loan debt and then failed to deliver the promised debt relief.
- Approximately \$153 million is being [mailed](#) to 109,000 consumers in the first distribution of refunds resulting from the law enforcement [actions](#) brought against Western Union by the FTC, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service. The affected consumers are receiving compensation for 100 percent of their losses. The FTC's complaint alleged that Western Union failed to put in place effective anti-fraud policies and procedures and to act promptly against problem agents. The company's settlement with the FTC required Western Union to pay \$586 million in monetary relief. That money was paid to DOJ in connection with Western Union's joint settlement with that agency. DOJ's Money Laundering and Asset Recovery Section is administering the consumer refund program. This distribution is the first of multiple payments over the coming months to consumers who lost money due to Western Union's actions.
- The FTC and FDA have [sent](#) warning letters to seven companies allegedly selling unapproved products that may violate federal law by making deceptive or scientifically unsupported claims about their ability to treat COVID-19. The warning letters are the first issued by the agencies alleging unapproved and/or unsupported claims that products can treat or prevent COVID-19. The agencies sent the letters to the following companies: 1) [Colloidal Vitality LLC](#), 2) [Quinessence Aromatherapy Ltd.](#), 3) [Zephyr LLC dba N-Ergetics](#), 4) [GuruNanda, LLC](#), 5) [Vivify Holistic Clinic](#), 6) [Herbal Amy Inc.](#), and 7) [The Jim Bakker Show](#).
- The FTC is [sending](#) refunds totaling more than \$6.9 million to small businesses, non-profits, and government agencies targeted by an office supply telemarketing scam that charged them for products they did not order. The FTC alleged that Telear Consulting Inc. and Karl Wesley Angel deceived childcare centers, schools, and police and fire departments. The FTC began mailing 13,181 refund checks averaging \$525 each to the victims of the scam. If recipients have questions about the refunds, they should contact the FTC's refund administrator, Rust Consulting, Inc., at 1-800-870-7192.
- FTC staff sent [letters to nine Voice over Internet Protocol \(VoIP\) service providers and other companies warning them](#) that "assisting and facilitating" illegal telemarketing or robocalls related to the COVID-19 pandemic is against the law. The letters were sent to VoIPMax, SipJoin Holding, Corp., iFly Communications, Third Rock

Securities and Exchange Commission:

- The Securities and Exchange Commission announced charges against a Russian national, Denis Georgiyevich Sotnikov and entities he controlled, for allegedly participating in a fraudulent scheme to lure U.S. investors into buying fictitious Certificates of Deposit (CDs) promoted through internet advertising and "spoofed" websites that mimic the actual sites of legitimate financial institutions. According to the SEC's [complaint](#), the scheme involved internet ads that targeted investors who were searching for CDs with high rates. The ads allegedly included links to phony websites, which falsely claimed that the firms offering the CDs were members of FINRA and the FDIC, and that deposits were FDIC-insured.

In other federal news:

- The Department of Justice [announced](#) its first action in federal court to combat fraud related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The enforcement action filed in Austin against operators of a fraudulent website "coronavirusmedicalkit.com" alleges the defendants are engaging in a wire fraud scheme seeking to profit from the confusion and widespread fear surrounding COVID-19. Information published on the website claimed to offer consumers access to World Health Organization (WHO) vaccine kits in exchange for a shipping charge of \$4.95, which consumers would pay by entering their credit card information on the website. In fact, there are currently no legitimate COVID-19 vaccines and the WHO is not distributing any such vaccine. In response to the department's request, U.S. District Judge Robert Pitman issued a temporary restraining order requiring that the registrar of the fraudulent website immediately take action to block public access to it.
- The Department of Justice has [charged](#) a New York resident with knowingly providing lists of potential victims to fraudulent mass-mailing schemes that tricked consumers into paying fees for falsely promised cash prizes and purportedly personalized "psychic" services. The indictment charged Norman Newman, 73, of Croton-on-Hudson, New York, with conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud and multiple counts of wire fraud. The indictment alleges that Newman provided list-brokerage services for more than 11 years to individual fraudster clients, knowing that the clients were mailing hundreds of thousands of deceptive prize notifications that misled victims into believing that they would receive a cash prize or personalized services upon payment of a fee. Many of the victims were elderly and vulnerable.
- Five federal financial regulatory agencies, the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, National Credit Union Administration, and Office of the Comptroller of the Currency issued a [joint statement](#) encouraging banks, savings associations, and credit unions to offer responsible small-dollar loans to consumers and small businesses in response to COVID-19.
- Attorney General William P. Barr, FBI Director Christopher A. Wray, and Chief Postal Inspector Gary R. Barksdale [announced](#) the largest coordinated sweep of elder fraud cases in history. This year, prosecutors charged more than 400 defendants, far surpassing the 260 defendants charged in cases as part of last year's sweep. In each case, offenders allegedly engaged in financial schemes that targeted or largely affected seniors. In total, the charged elder fraud schemes caused alleged losses of over a billion dollars. [This interactive map](#) provides state by state information on the elder fraud cases and education and prevention community outreach efforts highlighted by the sweep announcement.
- The Federal Communications Commission [proposed](#) fines against the nation's four largest wireless carriers for apparently selling access to their customers' location information without taking reasonable measures to protect against unauthorized access to that information. As a result, T-Mobile faces a proposed fine of more than \$91 million; AT&T faces a proposed fine of more than \$57 million; Verizon faces a proposed fine of more than \$48 million; and Sprint faces a proposed fine of more than \$12 million. The FCC also admonished these carriers for apparently disclosing their customers' location information, without their authorization, to a third party.
- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [issued](#) 22 warning letters to online and brick-and-mortar e-cigarette product retailers and manufacturers across the country who sell flavored, cartridge-based electronic nicotine delivery system products advising them that selling these products, which lack marketing authorization, is illegal. The warning letters were sent to some establishments with well-known names such as 7-Eleven and Shell and are the first of what will be a series of ongoing actions consistent with the FDA's [recently issued policy of enforcement priorities](#) for e-cigarettes and other deemed tobacco products on the market.
- The FDA provided an [update](#) on its comprehensive evaluation of cannabidiol (CBD) products, including several new steps in the areas of education, research and a risk-based enforcement policy.
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers assigned to Los Angeles International Airport, International Mail Facility, [intercepted](#) a package containing suspected counterfeit COVID-19 test kits arriving from the United Kingdom.
- The U.S. Department of Education [announced](#) that all borrowers with federally held student loans will automatically have their interest rates set to 0% for a period of at least 60 days. In addition, each of these borrowers will have the option to suspend their payments for at least two months to allow them greater flexibility during the national emergency. The relief will also allow borrowers to temporarily stop their payments without worrying about accruing interest.
- The FTC and U.S. Department of Justice Antitrust Division issued a [joint statement](#) detailing an expedited antitrust procedure and providing guidance for collaborations of businesses working to protect the health and safety of Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic. The expedited procedure notes, for example, that health care facilities may need to work together in providing resources and services to assist patients, consumers, and communities affected by the pandemic and its aftermath. Other businesses may need to temporarily combine production, distribution, or service networks to facilitate production and distribution of COVID-19-related supplies, according to the statement.
- The Federal Communications Commission [announced](#) the adoption of an [order](#) requiring originating and terminating voice service providers to implement the STIR/SHAKEN caller ID authentication framework in the IP portions of their networks, and proposing additional measures.

Attorney General Consumer Protection News and Other Items of Interest

Editor's Note: Attorneys General from across the country have issued numerous consumer alerts and guidance for avoiding COVID-19-related scams. Attorneys General have also issued cease and desist letters and engaged with private industry urging action to halt price gouging on important consumer goods and safety equipment. Space does not permit inclusion of a summary of each such release in the Consumer Protection Monthly, however a representative sample of such releases is provided in the news items below. Each such release is available on [consumerresources.org](#), which is maintained by the NAGTRI Center for Consumer Protection.

Led by Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro, Connecticut Attorney General William Tong, New Mexico Attorney General Hector Balderas, and Vermont Attorney General Thomas J. Donovan, Jr., a bipartisan group of 33 attorneys general sent [letters](#) to major online retailers Amazon, Craigslist, eBay, Facebook and Walmart urging their help to fight price gouging.

Led by New York Attorney General Letitia James and Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro, 27 attorneys general sent a [letter](#) to the U.S. Department of Education urging it to immediately implement emergency measures to protect federal student loan borrowers in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

Led by California Attorney General Xavier Becerra, 46 attorneys general [filed](#) an amicus [brief](#) in the United States Supreme Court supporting states' rights to regulate and address the rising cost of prescription drugs. In the amicus brief filed in *Rutledge v. Pharmaceutical Care Management Association*, the attorneys general argue that in order to protect the well-being of consumers, states must regulate pharmacy benefit managers, also known as PBMs. The brief supports the state of Arkansas' position that federal law does not prevent states from regulating PBMs. The brief argues that regulation of the prescription drug market, including PBMs, is a critical tool for states to protect residents and address the access and affordability of prescription drugs.

Led by North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein and Indiana Attorney General Curtis Hill, a bipartisan group of 33 attorneys general [filed](#) an amicus brief in support of the United States in *Barr v. AAPC*, a case that challenges the constitutionality of the federal ban on robocalls, a part of the Telephone Consumer Protection Act. A decision in the Fourth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals recently invalidated a portion of the Act, potentially jeopardizing the entire federal robocall ban. The [brief](#) highlights the strong interest attorneys general have in protecting their citizens from robocalls, which invade personal privacy and are used to perpetuate scams and fraud. The brief further explains that striking down the federal robocall ban would threaten the constitutionality of at least 42 similar state laws.

Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall announced partnerships with [Amazon](#) and [Facebook](#) to combat price gouging during pandemic.

Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich [announced](#) that his office has secured a nearly \$11 million consent judgment with CenturyLink to resolve allegations that the company engaged in deceptive and unfair advertising and billing practices by, among other things, failing to disclose fees and ultimately charging Arizona consumers more than the prices it promised in advertisements and sales pitches. The consent judgment is subject to court approval.

Attorney General Brnovich also [announced](#) the filing of a consumer fraud lawsuit against Valley Delivery, LLC, Next Day Delivery, LLC, and their owner, Matthew Willes, for allegedly deceiving Arizonans by leaving fake "missed delivery" slips on consumers' doors in order to obtain their personal information. When consumers called the company, Valley Delivery allegedly collected their personal information, matched the callers' phone number to their home addresses, and then sold it to third party companies who promptly inundated the consumers with telemarketing calls.

Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser [applauded](#) event organizers, airlines, hotels, and other businesses that have displayed good corporate citizenship by refunding consumers or issuing credit for cancellations related to the COVID-19 pandemic. General Weiser urged all such businesses to likewise honor cancellations and offer refunds or credit.

Attorney General William Tong [warned](#) consumers about scammers who may try to capitalize on fears of the COVID-19 pandemic by marketing and selling fake at-home testing kits for COVID-19.

District of Columbia Attorney General Karl Racine announced new emergency protections in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Among other protections, the [COVID-19 Response Act](#) prohibits evictions and utility shut-offs, prohibits landlords from charging late fees, outlaws stockpiling of essential goods, and increases price gouging penalties to \$5,000 per violation.

District of Columbia Attorney General Racine also [issued](#) cease and desist letters to online sellers and district stores to cease price gouging on household cleaners, hand sanitizer, latex gloves and other products in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Florida Attorney General Ashley Moody [issued](#) more than 40 subpoenas to third-party sellers in Florida accused of price gouging on essential commodities through accounts on Amazon. The subpoenas come as Attorney General Moody's Consumer Protection Division continues to review allegations of unlawful price increases on essential commodities during the COVID-19 state of emergency. Allegations against the third-party vendors include excessive price increases on commodities such as face masks, hand sanitizers and disinfectants of up to 1,662 percent.

Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr is [imploping](#) Georgia businesses and consumers to refrain from hoarding masks and other personal protective equipment that are urgently needed in hospitals.

Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul announced a 7th Circuit Court of Appeals [decision](#) upholding a district court judgment and injunction against Dish Network (Dish) over illegal calls made to people on the Do Not Call Registry. The decision affirms the district court findings that Dish is responsible for the illegal calls placed by its retailers because they were Dish's agents. The court also rejected Dish's arguments that the penalties for such conduct were excessive under the Constitution. The court remanded questions about the calculation of penalties and damages back to the trial court. The litigation was filed by the United States, California, Illinois, North Carolina, and Ohio.

Kentucky Attorney General Daniel Cameron [issued](#) subpoenas to six third-party sellers in Kentucky who used Amazon's online platform to engage in suspected price gouging during the COVID-19 pandemic. The sellers allegedly engaged in price gouging on essential emergency and medical supplies, including hand sanitizer and N95 respirator masks. Some sellers allegedly inflated the price of these items by as much as 1,951 percent when marketing to consumers.

Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey [announced](#) a consent judgment with the used car dealership JD Byrider. The dealership agreed to cancel debts, pay \$1.5 million to reduce car loan payments and provide restitution to thousands of consumers, and significantly change its practices. The settlement resolves [allegations](#) that the dealership took advantage of consumers and violated the Massachusetts consumer protection law by routinely using aggressive and misleading advertising and sales techniques to sell consumers cars it should have known the consumers could not afford, putting the consumers at high risk of default and repossession.

Massachusetts Attorney General Healey also [announced](#) emergency regulations to [prohibit price gouging](#) of essential products like hand sanitizer, face masks, and gloves and an [emergency regulation](#) designed to protect consumers from unfair and deceptive debt collection practices during the COVID-19 crisis.

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel issued a cease and desist letter to [Frequency Apps Corp. and Biores Technologies, Inc.](#) regarding their marketing of a "Coronavirus Defender" patch claiming, falsely, to offer protection from COVID-19. Another cease and desist letter was issued to [DiaMedical Equipment USA, Inc.](#) after the office received a consumer complaint that the company was attempting to sell 10-packs of face masks through its website for nearly \$100 each. Similar model masks are sold at between \$1.50 to \$2.40 per mask.

Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison entered into an [Assurance of Discontinuance](#) with Dragon Door Publications, Inc. (Dragon Door), a Minnesota-based online retailer of exercise and weight-lifting equipment. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, Dragon Door had not sold N95 masks in the course of its usual business but began selling them after the start of the COVID-19 crisis for \$5 each, plus shipping. It also offered to donate N95 masks with the sale of an exercise fitness program, which retails for \$499. Under an [Executive Order](#) issued by Minnesota's Governor, N95 face masks are classified as personal protective equipment (PPE) that non-hospital entities must refrain from using for any purpose "other than for use in delivering critical health care services or essential services requiring such equipment." The order also directs Minnesota entities to donate their PPE for use by critical health care workers.

Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt [announced](#) that his office has filed a lawsuit against Jim Bakker and Morningside Church Productions, Inc. for misrepresentations about the effectiveness of "Silver Solution" as a treatment for COVID-19. The lawsuit alleges that in a February 12, 2020, Jim Bakker Show production that aired nationwide, Bakker and guest Sherill Sellman, a "naturopathic doctor," claimed that "Silver Solution" can cure COVID-19. The broadcast and representations made on Bakker's website led the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the New York Attorney General's Office to issue cease and desist letters to the Jim Bakker Show directing Bakker to cease making claims about the product that are not supported by competent and reliable scientific evidence. The letter from the FDA also advises that currently, there are no vaccines, pills, potions or other prescription or over-the-counter products to treat or cure coronavirus disease.

Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt also [issued](#) a cease and desist letter to a Springfield area man who was confirmed, after investigation, to be selling N95 masks at inflated prices.

New York Attorney General Letitia James announced cease and desist letters to multiple companies allegedly selling fake COVID-19 treatments including [Wayne Allyn Root](#), [Alex Jones](#), [James Bakker](#), [The Silver Edge](#), and [Dr. Sherrill Sellman](#).

New York Attorney General Letitia James [announced](#) that the trial against multiple opioid manufacturers and distributors set to begin on March 20, 2020, will be delayed due to the ongoing risk posed by COVID-19. The judge who will oversee the trial scheduled a conference on April 14, 2020, to determine next steps and set a more concrete schedule for trial.

North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein [announced](#) that he is working with Amazon to investigate nine North Carolina businesses and sellers over price gouging concerns. Attorney General Stein was notified by Amazon that these sellers had raised prices dramatically for items that have been in high demand during the COVID-19 pandemic, including hand sanitizer and N95 masks.

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost [launched](#) the creation of a Robo Call Enforcement Unit and new tool that lets consumers report malicious robocalls to his office. The new unit, part of Yost's Consumer Protection Section, is dedicated to rooting out bad actors at every level of the robocall industry.

Oklahoma Attorney General Mike Hunter issued a [consumer alert](#) after receiving reports of individuals attempting to sell at-home tests for COVID-19.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton [filed](#) a lawsuit to stop Auctions Unlimited LLC from price gouging Texans for necessary, health-related supplies. According to Paxton's [petition](#), following the Texas Governor's disaster declaration, Auctions Unlimited listed an auction on its website for "over 750,000 face masks," and that listing included N95 particulate respirators, hand soap, all-purpose cleaner, and disinfectant wipes. On March 24, bidding on N95 respirator masks pushed listings as high as \$180 for a package of just 16 masks. Auctions Unlimited owner Tim Worstell admitted to receiving warnings from both local police and the Texas Attorney General; however, he moved forward with the exorbitantly priced auctions.

Vermont Attorney General Thomas J. Donovan, Jr. [filed](#) a lawsuit against Clearview AI, a data broker that uses facial recognition technology to map the faces of Vermonters, including children, and sells access to this data to private businesses, individuals, and law enforcement. The complaint alleges violations of the Vermont Consumer Protection Act and the new Data Broker Law. Along with the complaint, the State filed a motion for preliminary injunction, asking the court to order Clearview AI to immediately stop collecting or storing Vermonters' photos and facial recognition data. *Editor's Note: For more about this case, see this month's Article of the Month.*

Charities

California Attorney General Xavier Becerra issued a [consumer alert](#) to warn Californians about fraudulent charities during the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency.

Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller [announced](#) that Iowans who operated an alleged "puppy laundering" ring have agreed to a [Consent Judgment](#) and to dissolve their "pet rescue" nonprofits, permanently cease deceptive operations, pay the state \$60,000, and submit to other restrictions as part of a settlement. Miller's office alleged that the defendants had worked together to illegally transfer hundreds of designer puppies through sham Iowa non-profit "rescues" to out-of-state pet shops. The lawsuit accused the defendants of misleading consumers about the true source of the puppies.

Connecticut Attorney General William Tong [issued](#) consumer [guidance](#) for avoiding charity scams during the COVID-19 pandemic.

New Hampshire Attorney General Gordon J. MacDonald [urges](#) people in New Hampshire to be on the alert for charitable giving and consumer product scams related to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Legislation

D.C. Attorney General Karl A. Racine issued a [statement](#) noting passage of the Security Breach Protection Amendment Act of 2019. Last March, the Office of the Attorney General [introduced the legislation](#) to modernize the District's existing data breach law and strengthen protections for residents' personal information. The Council passed the bill unanimously.

Veterans and Military News

Nevada Attorney General Aaron D. Ford [released](#) information for members of the military, veterans and their families regarding free legal assistance through his [Office of Military Legal Assistance](#). The program pairs military service members in need of legal assistance with pro bono private legal counsel for civil matters.

Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson [launched](#) a campaign to raise awareness of National Guard members' legal rights if mobilized to assist in Covid-19 pandemic.

Upcoming Events

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, NAAG has decided to cancel the Consumer Protection Spring Conference in Raleigh. The meeting will not be rescheduled. NAAG's goal is to reschedule the conference in Raleigh for the Spring 2021 conference. We look forward to the NAAG Consumer Protection Fall Conference which is scheduled for October 26-28, 2020, in Washington, DC and have great hope that schedules will resume to normal by that time. In addition, the AG Symposium scheduled for April 20-22 in Denver has been cancelled and will not be rescheduled. Furthermore, all in-person NAGTRI trainings are cancelled through May 31. This includes the USPTO NAGTRI Regional Training scheduled in Denver for April 23-24.



Todd Leatherman, Program Counsel for the [Center for Consumer Protection](#), is the editor of *Center for Consumer Protection Monthly*, a compendium of information that may be of interest to the attorney general community and others interested in consumer protection. Neither the National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG) nor the National Attorneys General Training & Research Institute expresses a view as to the accuracy of the matters, nor as to the position expounded by the authors of the hyperlinked materials. Any use and/or copies of this newsletter in whole or part must include the customary bibliographic citation. NAAG retains copyright and all other intellectual property rights in the material presented in this publication. For content submissions or to contact the editor directly, please email tleatherman@naag.org or call 202-326-6044.



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