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Contact: Consumer Affairs Unit (831) 454-2050

DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE WARNS OF RENTAL SCAMS AHEAD OF SUMMER RENTAL SEASON

In advance of the summer vacation rental season, Santa Cruz County District Attorney Jeff Rosell is warning Santa Cruz County residents about a scam involving rental home advertisements on websites such as Craigslist, Airbnb, and VRBO.

Typically, the scammers take a legitimate rental listing and post it to one these home rental sites. The scammers then claim that they own the property and that it is available, but for a variety of reasons, they are unable to personally show prospective renters the property. The scammers' goal is to collect payments from prospective renters before the prospective renters realize that the scammers do not own the property.

Some indications that a posting may be fraudulent are: (1) the rent is much lower than other comparable rentals; (2) the property's "owner" or representative is unable to meet face-to-face with prospective renters; and (3) the "owner" or representative asks prospective renters for an upfront cash payment or to wire payment through services such as Western Union or Money Gram.

Prospective renters can help prevent themselves from becoming victims of these scammers by:

- Only dealing with property owners that you can meet in person;
- Never wiring payment in advance;
- Never giving out financial information such as account numbers, Social Security numbers, and PayPal information;
- Never renting a property sight-unseen;
- Never submitting to credit or background checks until you've met the landlord in person.

Please contact the Santa Cruz County District Attorney's Office Consumer Protection Division at (831) 454-2050 for more information on scams or to report suspected scams.