

Office of Attorney General Terry Goddard



STATE OF ARIZONA
DEPARTMENT OF LAW
1275 W. WASHINGTON STREET
PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85007-2926
WWW.AZAG.GOV

ANNE TITUS HILBY
PRESS SECRETARY
PHONE: (602) 542-8019
CELL PHONE: (602) 725-2200
ANNE.HILBY@AZAG.GOV

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Terry Goddard Files Lawsuit to Stop Alleged Property Tax Scam

(Phoenix, Ariz. — August 14, 2009) Attorney General Terry Goddard today announced that he has filed a lawsuit and obtained a temporary restraining order to stop the perpetrators of an alleged fraud that claimed a homeowner's property qualified for a "property tax reduction review." The official-looking advertisement appeared to be an attempt to scam homeowners who were looking to reduce their property tax bill.

The lawsuit names Property Tax Review Board, Inc., a Granada Hill, Calif.-based company; Property Tax Review Board's President and CEO Michael McConville, of Simi Valley, Calif., and Carmen Mercer, of Tombstone, owner of the Post Office box included in the solicitation.

Maricopa County Superior Court has granted Goddard's request for a temporary restraining order which requires the defendants to immediately stop:

- Representing to any Arizona property owner that a property tax reduction can be obtained on their behalf.
- Operating any business in Arizona that claims to offer property tax reduction services.
- Receiving any money from an Arizona property owner who responds to the solicitation.

Goddard's office and county assessors across Arizona have received hundreds of complaints regarding the solicitation since they became aware of it at the beginning of this month. The offer, which requests a \$189 processing fee, is not affiliated with any government entity. According to court documents, the document attempts to appear official and contains a "notice number" and deadline for prompt processing.

Assessed valuations for 2009 cannot be changed since the appeals process for 2009 has ended. In addition, there is no fee required to file a property valuation appeal with county treasurers' or assessors' offices in Arizona.

"The swift action taken on this case demonstrates how effective law enforcement can be when we work together to protect Arizonans," Goddard said. "I applaud the great work done by those in my office's Consumer Protection section, County Assessors from across the state and the

U.S. Postal Inspector's Office to quickly warn consumers and put a stop to this alleged scheme to defraud homeowners."

"This scheme was especially insidious because the deadline to appeal to have your property taxes reduced for 2009 has passed. There was no way the company could fulfill their claims to do so," said Pete Zegarac, Inspector in Charge of the Phoenix Division Postal Inspection Service. "The combined effort of the Arizona Attorney General's Office, the Postal Inspection Service, and the state's county assessors has been effective in ending this scam before more Arizona citizens were victimized."

The lawsuit, which was filed Thursday in Maricopa County Superior Court, alleges that the solicitations distributed by defendants McConville and Property Tax Review Board are completely fraudulent and deceptive because the deadline for appealing 2009 property valuations has lapsed. It further alleges that the defendants led consumers to believe they were conducting a legitimate business when, in fact, they were accepting monies for services that they cannot perform.

The lawsuit seeks to:

- Stop defendants from soliciting any Arizona property owner, by mail, telephone and/or internet to purchase property tax reduction services;
- Require the defendants to refund to consumers who mailed in payment for defendants services;
- Pay a fine of \$10,000 for each violation of the Arizona Consumer Fraud Act.

Earlier today, Mercer, who is a well-known activist for the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps., turned over to U.S. Postal Inspectors the Post Office box and the more than 1,000 responses she has received. Mercer, who has cooperated with investigators, claimed she was asked to open the Post Office box by a friend and that she did not know its intended purpose.

Postal Inspectors will be working to return the \$189 already sent by victims as well as any money sent by victims that has already been mailed but not yet arrived at the Post Office box. Victims seeking restitution should file a complaint with the Attorney General's Consumer Information and Complaint section. This office can be contacted in Phoenix at 602.542.5763, in Tucson at 520.628.6504, or outside the Phoenix and Tucson metro areas at 1.800.352.8431. Consumers can also file complaints online by visiting the Attorney General's Web site, www.azag.gov. To file a complaint in person, the Attorney General's Office has satellite offices throughout the state with volunteers available to help. Locations and hours of operation are posted on the Attorney General's Web site.

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