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For Immediate Release:  
August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019

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## **Phishing: Never in Season**

With the expansive role internet has played in society over the past decade, it is easy to focus on the positives of technology while forgetting to consider the negatives. Your online presence opens you up to many threats, including identity theft. Once they have stolen your identity, they can make withdrawals from your bank, open new utility accounts under your name, and even get medical treatment on your health insurance. We need to make sure that we are taking the right precautions to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe online.

An easy way to prevent identity theft is to learn how to spot ‘phishing’ emails, which use fake links to websites or suspicious attachments in order to download a virus to your computer that steals your personal information. These emails may look trustworthy, but often contain spelling mistakes, suspicious attachments, or links to unknown websites. We should be especially cautious if the email is designed in a way to make us panic. Be sure to take the time to think if the email is asking something reasonable of you and if you know the person sending it.

If I am unsure if something is real, I contact the company or individual the email or Facebook message is claiming to be to make sure they are who they say they are. For example, if you receive an email that is supposedly from your bank but contains suspicious links, contact your bank directly to verify.

How do we know if we have been the victim of identity theft? The Federal Trade Commission provides a list of common signs here: <https://www.identitytheft.gov/warning-signs-of-identity-theft>. Always be on the lookout for suspicious bank activity or medical bills of unknown origin. It is important that we are able to recognize when identity theft has occurred so that we can begin to take matters back into our own hands.

If you think your identity has been stolen, there are measures you can take to recover it. A good place to start would be <https://www.identitytheft.gov/>. Following the “Get Started” link will take you to an online tool that will walk you through some steps that you can take.

The internet is a great tool, but we must be aware of the dangers before we can use it in a way that is safe to ourselves and our loved ones.

As always, feel free to contact my office with questions, comments, or concerns.

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