



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

'Tis the Season of Giving

PATTY RITCHIE December 2, 2013

Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

From shopping for gifts and decorating the house from top to bottom to parties and visiting loved ones, it's easy to get lost in the busyness that is the holiday season and forget that there are many people who are going without the things that make this time of year so special.

One of the most important things you can do this holiday season is to make a charitable donation to help those who are less fortunate. This time of year, there are a number of opportunities to donate to non-profits and charities. However, there are also opportunities for scammers to take advantage of your generosity. Here are tips on how you can give back this holiday season and make it count:

Confirm the charity is vetted by the Attorney General's office: By visiting the Attorney General's Charities Bureau Registry at www.charitiesnys.com, you can see if the charity you're considering giving to is registered and if they have filed financial reports with the Attorney General's office.

Give of your time: Last year, nearly 27 percent of adults in the United States volunteered, contributing 12.7 billion hours of their time worth an estimated \$259.6 billion. Donations don't always have to be monetary. Making a difference can be as easy as volunteering your time at a local soup kitchen, visiting the elderly or helping out at a food drive.

Know where your dough will go: It's always a good idea to find out from the charity what your donation will be used for. Review the charity's financial reports for details on how the organization spends donations. It's also a good idea to take a look at *Pennies for Charity*, an annual report published by the New York Attorney General that details how much organizations spend on fundraising costs and how much is kept by the charity.

Watch out for telemarketing scams: Think twice before giving to telemarketers who call on behalf of nonprofits, as a large chunk of your donation may go to the telemarketer, who is working for a profit. To ensure your contribution makes more of an impact, it's often times a good idea to donate directly to the organization you're looking to support. And, it goes without saying that you should never disclose personal information—such as your security number—over the phone.

Recent statistics show that the average person makes 24 percent of their annual donations to charitable organizations between Thanksgiving and New Year's. This year, I hope that not only will you give back, but also that you do so in a way that's safe and makes the biggest difference in the lives of those in need this holiday season.