

## Payback long overdue

### Human Services Spotlight Series #12

Pinellas County Consumer Protection became aware of an individual who was taking large deposits from churches and contracting to install sound systems but failing to complete the jobs or return the money. The individual took a total of \$48,721.94 in deposits from two churches in the St. Pete and Clearwater area. Consumer Protection investigated these two complaints and determined that, in addition to taking payments and abandoning the jobs, he was illegally contracting to perform work he was not licensed to do.

The first church signed two contracts with the individual who agreed to purchase and install audio equipment during the spring of 2017. He accepted two deposit checks totaling \$37,331.94 and deposited them into his bank account. After receiving the money, he failed to provide and install the equipment at the church and refused to return the money. Four months later, another church contracted with the individual to repair their damaged sound system and lighting system and provided him with a check for \$11,390. The individual again deposited the money into his bank account and failed to perform the work or provide a refund.

The two churches trusted that the individual who appeared to have a legitimate business and the ability to perform the work would use the deposits to purchase and install the materials. Both churches attempted to reach out to the individual, but, after the delays, excuses, and failure to provide the materials that he supposedly purchased, they requested that he

return the money so they could hire someone else to perform the work. Consumer Protection investigated the events that occurred and gathered the evidence that showed the individual violated the law, and the State Attorney's Office was able to file two counts of Grand Theft and two counts of Unlicensed Contracting. He plead guilty in January 2020 to the charges and was ordered to pay the amount he took from the churches which was \$48,721.94 in restitution.

**Protect**

**Regulate**

**Investigate**

**Educate**

Sometimes, it is hard to spot fraud when it is happening. Scams can be large or small, sophisticated or simple, but the people behind them have two things in common: they want to steal your money and avoid being caught. The reality is anyone could fall victim to a scam, no matter your age, intellect or economic status. Most consumer transactions are completed satisfactorily. On occasion, however, any consumer could experience unresolved problems such as defective products, erroneous bills or non-delivery of goods or services.

When you are confronted with such a situation, the dedicated employees of Pinellas County Consumer Protection are here to assist you. Investigators are available to speak with you regarding a consumer transaction at (727) 464-6200.

[www.pinellascounty.org/consumer](http://www.pinellascounty.org/consumer)



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