

## Vacation Rentals vs COVID-19

### Human Services Spotlight Series #15

Sometime during January of 2020, the Complainant booked a vacation rental (condo) in St. Petersburg. The rental was for the period of April 4<sup>th</sup> through April 11<sup>th</sup> of 2020. The Complainant stated she paid the full price of \$2,888.85 for the rental with a credit card. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent issuance of Governor's Executive Order 20-87 on March 27, 2020, the Complainant was unable to complete her trip and occupy the condo. The executive order suspended vacation rental operations. The Complainant requested a cancellation and a full refund from the rental company, but her requests were denied.

The Complainant and the Subject communicated on a continuous basis during the months of March and April. The Subject informed the Complainant, company policy dictated no refunds were provided for cancellations made within 45 days of the booked date. Considering the current events caused by the pandemic and the executive order they were looking into this issue.

During their conversations, the Subject offered the Complainant several options in lieu of reimbursement. The Subject offered to resell the Complainant's booking to another customer, though the sale price might be lower than the Complainant's cost. The Subject also initially offered to extend the booking dates through the end of 2020, and later offered to extend the booking dates through Spring Break of 2021. The Complainant countered that the closing of the beaches, restaurants and entertainment centers

made those unreasonable offers and again requested a full refund. The Subject refused this request and mentioned to the Complainant that the condo owners needed their money.

The Complainant filed a complaint with this Department and disputed the charge with her credit card company. The Subject subsequently disputed the chargeback. The Consumer Protection Investigator contacted the Subject and, discussed the matter seeking to assist both parties in achieving a resolution. The Subject informed the CP Investigator, it was company policy to dispute all chargebacks, but they would investigate the matter. The CP Investigator contacted the company's CFO concerning the issue. Shortly afterwards the Complainant contacted the CP Investigator and advised, the Subject would not dispute the chargeback and she would be credited the full amount.

## Protect Regulate Investigate Educate

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.

[consumer@pinellascounty.org](mailto:consumer@pinellascounty.org)



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