Press Release

Attorney General Ellison and U.S. Attorney MacDonald announce coordinated fight against unlawful activity related to COVID-19

Minnesota COVID-19 Action Team to swiftly investigate, prosecute, and enforce state and federal law; AG Office's to serve as centralized hub for reports of COVID-19-related unlawful activity; dedicated complaint form now live on AG website

April 6, 2020 (SAINT PAUL) — Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison and United States Attorney for the District of Minnesota Erica H. MacDonald today jointly announced the formation of the Minnesota COVID-19 Action Team (MCAT), a coordinated statewide effort focused on swiftly investigating and prosecuting unlawful activity associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and enforcing all state and federal laws and executive orders to put an end to it.

The MCAT urges the public to report any COVID-19-related criminal behavior, price-gouging, scams, cyber crimes, hate crimes, or other unlawful activity to the Minnesota Attorney General's Office as a centralized hub for such reports or complaints. These reports will be shared with the MCAT and its law-enforcement partners. The Attorney General's Office has established a dedicated COVID-19-specific complaint form that is live as of today. Minnesotans with any concerns or complaints about unlawful activity related to COVID-19 may also call the Attorney General's office (651) 296-3353 or (800) 657-3787.

"Now is the time for Minnesotans to turn toward each other, not against each other. The vast majority of people and businesses are doing that: they're doing right by each other, their customers, and communities, and we thank them. But for those that aren't — for those who are profiteering off the pandemic or using it as a pretext to attack other people — we're not standing for it. We're pooling all our resources to come after them and to help all other Minnesotans afford their lives and live with dignity and respect," Attorney General Ellison said.

"Together, we are living through an extremely challenging and unprecedented time. Unfortunately, there are bad actors who seek to exploit these challenges by preying on vulnerable individuals for a quick financial profit, launching a myriad of insidious cyber scams, or carrying out bias-motivated acts of violence. This type of criminal activity is reprehensible and will not go unpunished," said U.S. Attorney MacDonald. "The MCAT's number one priority is the safety and security of all Minnesotans during this extremely challenging time. We are marshalling all available resources to meet that mission."

"Let us be clear: Minnesota law enforcement remains on-duty and committed to meeting the critical mission of protecting individuals, families and communities. Ignorant, hateful attacks have no place in Minnesota and will not be tolerated. And to those who seek to make a quick buck by exploiting the fears and vulnerabilities of individuals, your illegal behavior will not be tolerated," U.S. Attorney MacDonald added.

“Our county attorneys appreciate the leadership of our U.S. Attorney and our Attorney General in forming this team. It is another example of the importance of coordination and cooperation between federal, state, and local prosecutors in protecting our communities,” said Robert Small, executive director of the Minnesota County Attorneys Association.

The MCAT, led by the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Minnesota, the Minnesota Attorney General’s Office, and the Minnesota County Attorneys Association, unites the collective criminal and civil investigative and enforcement power of federal, state, local, and tribal law-enforcement agencies in order to protect the citizens of Minnesota from any wrongdoing related the COVID-19 pandemic. Through outreach, investigation, enforcement, and prosecution, the MCAT will address reports of COVID-19-related unlawful activity, including fraud scams, price gouging, hoarding of essential medical supplies, scams targeting economic impact payments (i.e., stimulus checks), phishing emails, and other cybercrimes. The MCAT will serve as a clearinghouse for any such reports or complaints that the public submits to the Attorney General’s Office or any federal, state, or local agency, provide for a swift and coordinated law-enforcement response, and facilitate the sharing of information about COVID-19-related unlawful conduct occurring anywhere in Minnesota.

Additionally, the MCAT will promptly investigate and refer for civil action or criminal prosecution any instances of COVID-19-related hate crimes targeting specific communities and threats to and assaults upon law enforcement.