Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation
Chicago Field Office
Acting Special Agent in Charge Tamera Cantu

Date: Jan. 19, 2021
Contact: Genevieve Billia
            (312) 952-9505
            Genevieve.billia@ci.irs.gov

IRS Criminal Investigation warns Indiana taxpayers about new wave of COVID-19 scams as second round of Economic Impact Payments are delivered

CHICAGO — The Internal Revenue Service's Criminal Investigation Division (IRS-CI) is warning Indiana taxpayers about a new wave of COVID-19-related scams as the agency delivers the second round of Economic Impact Payments.

In the last several months, IRS-CI has seen a variety of Economic Impact Payment (EIP) scams and other financial schemes designed to steal money and personal information from taxpayers. Criminals are taking advantage of the second round of Economic Impact Payments – as well as the approaching filing season – to trick honest taxpayers out of their hard-earned money.

"Criminals will look for any opportunity to take what they are not entitled to and this is no exception," said Acting Special Agent in Charge Tamera Cantu, of IRS Criminal Investigation, Chicago Field Office. "This payment is meant to help those that are struggling to get by as a result of the economic downturn caused by the pandemic. Be wary of any phone calls, emails, or text messages asking for your personal information or offering a deal that seems too good to be true," said Cantu.

Some common COVID-19 scams include:

- Text messages asking taxpayers to disclose bank account information under the guise of receiving the $1,200 Economic Impact Payments.

- Phishing schemes using email, letters and social media messages with key words such as "Coronavirus," "COVID-19," and "stimulus" in varying ways. These communications are blasted to large numbers of people and aim to access personally identifying information and financial account information (including account numbers and passwords).

- The organized and unofficial sale of fake at-home COVID-19 test kits (as well as

offers to sell fake cures, vaccines, pills, and professional medical advice regarding unproven COVID-19 treatments).

- Fake donation requests for individuals, groups and areas heavily affected by the disease.

- Bogus opportunities to invest in companies developing COVID-19 vaccines while promising that the "company" will dramatically increase in value as a result.

Although criminals are constantly changing their tactics, taxpayers can help protect themselves by acting as the first line of defense. The best way to avoid falling victim to a scam is knowing how the IRS communicates with taxpayers. The IRS does not send unsolicited texts or emails. The IRS does not call people with threats of jail or lawsuits, nor does it demand tax payments on gift cards.

IRS-CI continues investigating hundreds of COVID-19-related cases with law enforcement agencies domestically and abroad and educating taxpayers about scams.

COVID-19 scams should be reported to the National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) Hotline at 1-866-720-5721 or submitted through the NCDF Web Complaint Form. The NCDF is a national coordinating agency within the Department of Justice's Criminal Division dedicated to improving the detection, prevention, investigation and prosecution of criminal conduct related to natural and man-made disasters and other emergencies.

Taxpayers can also report fraud or theft of their Economic Impact Payments to the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA). Reports can be made online at TIPS.TIGTA.GOV.

Taxpayers who receive unsolicited emails or social media attempts to gather information that appear to be from either the IRS or an organization closely linked to the IRS, should forward the message to phishing@irs.gov. Taxpayers are encouraged not to engage potential scammers online or on the phone.

To learn more about COVID-19 scams and other financial schemes visit IRS.gov. Official IRS information about COVID-19 and Economic Impact Payments can be found on the Coronavirus Tax Relief page, which is updated frequently.

-30-