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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Consumer Alert: Craigslist Rental Scam**

The Humboldt County District Attorney's Office is warning local house hunters to be aware of an apparent Craigslist rental scam.

Humboldt County Craigslist recently featured postings by scammers who find vacant residential property, pose as the property owner and "offer" the homes for rent through the online ads.

Individuals posting the ads claim to be out of the country for work or other reasons, communicate only through email and require that a deposit for the rental be wired to a foreign account.

According to Humboldt County District Attorney's Office Investigator Mike Losey, these listings are often offered at far below market value, making them especially attractive to college students and low income families looking for inexpensive rentals. "Once a perspective tenant wires funds, that money becomes almost impossible to trace or track down. The financial consequences can be devastating," he said.

Sometimes interested renters are asked to provide social security and credit card numbers, a work history and other personal information. The scammers then use that information to commit identity theft and other crimes.

To avoid being victimized, perspective tenants should

- Go through a reputable, local property management company
- Be suspicious of any rental listing that offers property for significantly less than market value
- Meet the owner personally at the rental and insist on a tour of the interior
- Carefully research any individual or company that requires perspective tenants to wire the deposit, especially to a foreign account
- Carefully verify e-mail correspondence from a landlord or property owner written in poor or broken English
- Don't give out personal information, like social security, bank account, or credit card numbers via email or over the phone to people you don't know or trust