

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 14, 2020

The Honorable Joseph J. Simons
Chairman
Federal Trade Commission
600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20580

Dear Chairman Simons:

We write to express our concern following reports highlighting the recent emergence of coronavirus (COVID-19) contact tracing scams to financially exploit consumers and to request specific information on what the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is doing to ensure seniors are protected during the pandemic.

As businesses reopen and cities and states use various methods of contact tracing—the process by which public health officials identify and track people who have come in contact with an individual who has tested positive for coronavirus—recent reports have highlighted repeated incidents of scammers posing as contact tracers to financially exploit consumers and steal their personal identifying information, such as Social Security, bank account, and credit card numbers.¹

We have serious concerns about seniors—who lose an estimated \$3 billion annually to financial fraud²—being targeted by scammers seeking to exploit their vulnerability to the virus.³ It is for this reason that we introduced the bipartisan *Protecting Seniors from Emergency Scams Act*, which directs the FTC to report to Congress on scams targeting seniors during the pandemic and make recommendations on how to prevent future scams during emergencies. We are concerned that seniors—arguably the most vulnerable population to both the coronavirus and bad actors—will be similarly targeted in contact tracing scams.

While we understand that the FTC has partnered with the Department of Justice (DOJ) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to warn consumers about and investigate

¹Brown, Christopher. (2020, June 30). *Contact Tracing Scams Emerge as Latest Trick in Covid-19 Book*. Bloomberg Law. Retrieved from <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/health-law-and-business/contact-tracing-scams-emerge-as-latest-trick-in-covid-fraud-book>; Kim, Katie and Capitanini, Lisa. (2020, May 28). *How to Spot Contact Tracing Scams*. NBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/how-to-spot-contact-tracing-scams/2279392/>

² Senate Committee on Aging. (2019, January 16) *Aging Committee Examines Law Enforcement's Efforts to Crack Down on Fraud That Costs Seniors Billions Annually*. Retrieved from <https://www.aging.senate.gov/press-releases/aging-committee-examines-law-enforcements-efforts-to-crack-down-on-fraud-that-costs-seniors-billions-annually>

³ Klobuchar, Moran Introduce Legislation to Protect Seniors from Scams During Coronavirus Pandemic. (2020, May 21). Retrieved from <https://www.klobuchar.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/news-releases?ID=93537FE4-A343-4CF2-BC04-226889B52D3A>

contact tracing scams,⁴ we believe additional measures must be considered to educate seniors about how to protect themselves from this type of fraud. Contact tracing is an essential part of limiting the spread of the virus, and we encourage the FTC to take action to better educate seniors in understanding how to recognize legitimate contact tracing exercises and understand their recourse options should they fall victim to these evolving scams. We also respectfully request that you respond to the following questions:

1. What action has the FTC taken to date to coordinate with DOJ, HHS, states, and private stakeholders to educate seniors about contact tracing scams and how to protect themselves?
2. Is the FTC planning to take additional measures to better protect seniors and assist them should they become victim to a contact tracing scam? If so, please describe these measures.
3. What data has the FTC collected on the number of contact tracing scams since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic? Is the FTC providing this data to its law enforcement partners as part of its Consumer Sentinel Network?
4. Does the FTC need additional resources to better protect seniors from contact tracing scams? If so, please describe these resource needs in detail.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Jerry Moran
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

⁴ Department of Justice. (2020, June 30). The Justice Department, Department of Health and Human Services, and the Federal Trade Commission Partner to Alert Public of Contact Tracing COVID-19 Fraud Schemes. Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-department-health-and-human-services-and-federal-trade-commission-partner>; Tressler, Colleen. (2020, May 19). COVID-19 Contact Tracing Text Message Scams. Federal Trade Commission. Retrieved from <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/2020/05/covid-19-contact-tracing-text-message-scams>