

Monthly Columns

by Attorney General Jack Conway



March 2009

As Attorney General, my top priority has been to make Kentucky a safer place to live, work and raise a family. On March 26, Governor Beshear signed into law House Bill 315, the comprehensive cybercrimes legislation that I authored and promoted along with Rep. Johnny Bell of Glasgow. This historic legislation, which goes into effect June 25, will strengthen Kentucky laws to help protect children from Internet predators and update areas where the law lags technology. This was not only a personal victory, but a victory for law enforcement, prosecutors and families across the Commonwealth.

This is also a victory for the family of Rachel Neblett, the 17-year-old Mount Washington girl who committed suicide in 2006 after being cyberstalked. I have worked closely with Rachel's father, Mark Neblett, in promoting this legislation and am pleased to say that this new law makes cyberstalking a crime in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

I am extremely grateful to the Neblett family, Rep. Bell and the bi-partisan support of Kentucky lawmakers such as Senate President David Williams, House Speaker Greg Stumbo and Sen. Robert Stivers. I would also like to thank the many parents and police officers from across the Commonwealth who called their legislators to support this bill.

My commitment to cybersafety education will continue. To date, I've

spoken to more than 14,000 Kentucky students about the dangers that exist online and 20 more school cybersafety assemblies are planned by year's end.

For more information on my cybercrimes legislation, as well as video and photos from the bill signing, please visit www.ag.ky.gov.

Gas Price Investigations

In addition to cybercrimes initiatives, my office also remains focused on multiple gas price investigations in the Commonwealth, which includes the probe into the wholesale price of gasoline in Louisville. The investigation I launched in July 2008 with Governor Beshear showed that Louisville retailers are paying about 20 cents more per gallon for gas when compared to prices reported in other parts of the state.

The Federal Trade Commission is reviewing evidence from that investigation. I have also asked that the FTC review the 1997 merger of Marathon and Ashland Oil and its impact on the entire Kentucky petroleum market. I hope to meet soon with newly appointed FTC Chair Jon Leibowitz to discuss our request.

I was encouraged to hear from Attorney General Eric Holder during a recent meeting that he plans to create a more active antitrust division within the Justice Department that would look at such matters as the Marathon and Ashland Oil merger.

Debt-Relief Scams On the Rise

I also want to caution consumers about the rise in debt relief scams. My Office of Consumer Protection is receiving an increased number of complaints from victims of financial scams. As we saw following the wind and ice storms, scam artists work overtime to prey on people who need assistance. The following are some important tips for consumers to keep in mind during these trying economic times.

- Be leery of free government grants or stimulus money advertised on the Internet
- Do not complete online forms in order to qualify for the so-called "free grants"
- Ignore messages from debt-relief companies claiming that you qualify for a monetary advance
- Avoid any company that requests an upfront fee
- Check with the Office of the Attorney General or Better Business Bureau before doing business with a company. Debt adjusters are required to register with the Office of the Attorney General

To report suspicious companies offering debt-relief services, please call our Consumer Protection Hotline at 1-866-432-9257. If you are in danger of foreclosure, contact Protect My Kentucky Home at 1-866-830-7868.