NYPD on the hunt for scammers posing as agents

In the latest real estate scams to hit New York, two suspects are posing as real estate agents and asking renters to transfer deposits for apartments that either do not exist or they have no right to rent.

The New York City Police Department (NYPD) have been notified of a man and a woman who, in two unrelated cases, reportedly scammed renters into transferring security deposits for fake apartment listings.

An unidentified man in the Queens borough collected over $23,000 from 11 people between July and December 2018, by asking for security deposits for five apartments in Corona and North Corona. Each deposit ranged from $1,850 to $2,900, in person, after which the man became unreachable. Police said the man identifies by names including ‘Antonio,’ ‘Toni,’ ‘Angel Dejesus’ and ‘Jesus Parra’ and released a photo of him to the public.

Courtesy of NYPD

“The New York Police Department is asking for the public’s assistance in identifying the male

depicted in the photo wanted for questioning in connection to several grand larcenies that occurred within the confines of the 110th and 115th Precincts," a NYPD rep told Inman in an email.

Meanwhile, a similar scam was also taking place in Brooklyn. Mahabbat Albualieva, 24, was arrested and charged with two counts of petit larceny and two counts of criminal impersonation – the NYPD said she listed apartments in Brooklyn in another language on Facebook and then met with the respondents to collect deposits. In total, Albualieva collected $500, $200 and $700 from three female would-be renters before disappearing entirely.

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While the NYPD does not believe the two incidents are related, neither the man nor Albualieva had authority to rent out the apartments they were advertising.

Mahabbat Albualieva.

Dave Legaz, a retired NYPD sergeant who now works as a Keller Williams broker and is the treasurer for the New York Association of Realtors, said that the scam is a fairly common one — scammers will pull older listings from the internet and pretend to rent them out to get security deposits from interested renters. To avoid falling prey, renters can meet with the landlord in person, do a quick Google search to confirm the owner of the property they want to rent and avoid giving any security deposit in cash even if the landlord is legitimate.

“The scammers will often take a listing that is legitimately for sale or rent, duplicate it, and then put a Craigslist ad that it’s for rent,” said Legaz, adding that those who encounter similar scams can also report them to IC3.gov for FBI investigation. Meanwhile, agents who work with landlords should also do background checks to avoid sending scammers out into real estate circles.

Over the past year, several common scams have been circulating in the real estate industry. In one, scammers pose as a homebuyers' agent in a bid to convince them to wire money. In another, scammers have posed as police to target female real estate agents, and in yet another, they've sent fake leads that appear similar to those from Trulia and Realtor.com.

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