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AARP Pennsylvania Advises on Early Tax Filing and Caution Against Tax Preparation Fraud

Harrisburg, PA – with tax season upon us, AARP Pennsylvania emphasizes the importance of early tax filing and the vigilance required to avoid tax preparation fraud, urging individuals to protect their personal information from both identity thieves and unscrupulous tax preparers.

"Procrastination in filing taxes opens the door to identity theft. Equally, entrusting your tax preparation to the wrong hands can lead to serious financial and legal repercussions," states Mary Bach, Volunteer and Chair of the Consumer Issues Task Force at AARP Pennsylvania. "Filing your taxes early and ensuring your tax preparer is reputable are key steps in safeguarding your financial health."

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) warns against "ghost" preparers, who lack the necessary legal credentials and leave clients vulnerable to inaccuracies and fraud. These fraudulent operators often promise inflated refunds, basing their fees on the refund amount, and may engage in deceptive practices such as inventing income or claiming false deductions.

David Kalinoski, AARP Associate State Director of Community Outreach, highlights the importance of diligence when selecting a tax preparer. "Ensure your tax professional is properly credentialed with an IRS-issued identification and ask about their data security practices. Remember, you are ultimately responsible for the information on your tax return, regardless of who prepares it."

AARP Pennsylvania recommends the following tips to avoid tax preparation fraud:

- Verify the tax preparer's credentials and professional standing.
- Be wary of preparers promising unusually high refunds.
- Ensure the tax preparer signs your return and includes their identification number.
- Review your tax return thoroughly before signing.

In addition to these precautions, AARP Pennsylvania encourages utilizing the AARP Foundation Tax-Aide Program, which offers free tax preparation assistance from trained and IRS-certified volunteers.

The IRS' Identity Theft Central page has numerous resources for individuals, businesses and tax professionals on preventing and dealing with fallout from tax identity theft, including a guide for taxpayers and detailed information on assistance for victims.

Protect your finances this tax season by filing early, choosing your tax preparer wisely, and staying informed about potential scams.