



Investor Alert

There's No Such Thing as a Free Lunch ***Be cautious if invited to a "free" financial seminar***

Financial and investment seminars that include a free meal are often used to lure people – especially older Americans – into investing in unsuitable or even fraudulent products. The seminar representatives like to wine and dine you before using persuasive talk to convince you to invest your hard-earned money. Such investments, while tempting, can be risky.

You may enjoy the free meal, but it would be wise to never buy or invest in anything without first doing some research. Here are a few tips that can help you keep your money safe from aggressive sales people and scammers.

Listen for these 'Red Flag' phrases:

- Your profit is guaranteed
- You'll get a higher rate of return
- There's no risk
- This offer is only good today
- Make your check payable to me

Be sure the investment product is registered

Most investments are some form of a security, which must be registered with the Ohio Division of Securities or with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). If it's not registered, don't invest.

Check the seller's background

Is the person properly licensed in Ohio or with the SEC to sell the investment product? If not, beware. To check on a salesperson's background:

- Contact the Ohio Division of Securities' Investor Protection Hotline at 877-683-7841. The Division staff can tell you if the broker is legally licensed to sell within the state.
- Use FINRA's free online database called [BrokerCheck](#) to see employment history, certifications and licenses, as well as regulatory actions, violations or complaints files against the person.

Does the investment match your financial goals?

Even if the product is registered and the seller is properly licensed, you need to carefully consider if the investment is right for you. Are you comfortable with the level of risk? Is the timeframe to access your funds or the length of time before you will see a return something you can live with? Do you know what the financial penalties are for early withdrawals?

The bottom line

Before you attend a free-meal investment seminar, be aware that you may be urged to invest in something that could be – at best – inappropriate for your financial situation or worse, a scam. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

To avoid potential financial fraud, investors are encouraged to call the Division's Investor Protection Hotline at 877-683-7841 before they invest money and ask:

- Is the brokerage firm and salesperson licensed to sell securities in Ohio?
- Have any enforcement actions been taken against them?
- Has the security been properly registered with the Division of Securities?