

Advisory- Scam on the Rise

Master Corporal Melissa Jaffe, Delaware State Police 05/16/2018

Dover - The Delaware State Police are issuing the following advisory in response to a recent increase in reported incidents involving virtual kidnapping scam phone calls. While the incidents began in New Castle County, it has now come to light in Sussex County, and is an advisory state wide.

Virtual kidnapping is an extortion scheme that tricks victims into paying a ransom to free a family member they believe is being threatened with violence or death. Unlike traditional abductions, virtual kidnappers have not actually kidnapped anyone. Instead, through deceptions and threats, they coerce victims to pay a quick ransom.

Law enforcement agencies have been aware of virtual kidnapping fraud for at least two decades, but recently, this scam which was once limited to Mexico and southwest border states has evolved, so that U.S. residents anywhere could be potential victims.

The FBI has provided the following tips to avoid falling victim to this specific scam trend:

Don't Become a Victim

The success of any type of virtual kidnapping scheme depends on speed and fear. Criminals know they only have a short time to exact a ransom before the victims unravel the scam or authorities become involved. To avoid becoming a victim, look for these possible indicators:

- Callers go to great lengths to keep you on the phone, insisting you remain on the line.
- Calls do not come from the supposed victim's phone.
- Callers try to prevent you from contacting the "kidnapped" victim.
- Calls include demands for ransom money to be paid via wire transfer; ransom amount demands may drop quickly.

If you receive a phone call from someone demanding a ransom for an alleged kidnap victim, the following should be considered:

- In most cases, the best course of action is to hang up the phone.
- If you do engage the caller, don't call out your loved one's name.
- Try to slow the situation down. Request to speak to your family member directly. Ask, "How do I know my loved one is okay? Ask questions only the alleged kidnap victim would know, such as the name of a pet. Avoid sharing information about yourself or your family."
- Listen carefully to the voice of the alleged victim if they speak.
- Attempt to contact the alleged victim via phone, text, or social media, and request that they call back from their cell phone.
- To buy time, repeat the caller's request and tell them you are writing down the demand, or tell the caller you need time to get things moving.
- Don't agree to pay a ransom, by wire or in person. Delivering money in person can be dangerous.

This information was provided through the FBI website located at:

<https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/virtual-kidnapping>

Many of these scams are difficult to investigate. They will target persons of all age groups. Delaware State Police is asking citizens to remember the tips previously mentioned in order to not become a victim of one of these scam artists.

If you suspect a real kidnapping is taking place or you believe a ransom demand is a scheme, contact your local law enforcement immediately.