

Warning Regarding Virtual Kidnapping Scams

The Ventura Police Department has seen an increase in “virtual kidnapping” extortion calls in the City of Ventura. There have been multiple reported incidents targeting Spanish speakers. These extortion schemes are particularly alarming in nature because a scammer contacts the victim via telephone and demands payment for the return of a “kidnapped” family member or loved one. While no actual kidnapping has taken place, the callers often use co-conspirators to convince their victims of the legitimacy of the threat. For example, a caller might attempt to convince a victim that his daughter was kidnapped by having a young female scream for help in the background during the call.

Scammers sometimes represent themselves as members of a drug cartel from Mexico targeting victims with family in Mexico. They will typically provide the victim with specific instructions to ensure the safe “return” of the alleged kidnapped individual. These instructions usually involve demands of a ransom payment and instructions usually require the ransom payment to be made immediately and most often by wire transfer or prepaid cards. These schemes involve varying amounts of ransom demands. In one case an amount was paid by the victim and the scammer later called again demanding a higher payment.

Most schemes use various techniques to instill a sense of fear, panic and urgency in an effort to rush the victim into making a very haste decision. The criminal’s success depends on this general urgency and fear. They know they only have a short time to exact a ransom payment before the victim and their families determine it is a scam or authorities become involved.

Criminals often use social media to gather information and track their potential victims. The Ventura Police Department would like to remind the community to be cautious of the amount of personal information posted on social media.

To avoid becoming a victim, look for these possible scam indicators:

Callers go to great lengths to keep you on the phone, insisting you remain on the line.

Calls do not come from the victim’s phone.

Callers try to prevent you from contacting the “kidnapped” victim.

Multiple excessive phone calls.

Incoming calls made from an outside area code.

Demands for ransom money to be paid via wire transfer, not in person.

Due to an increased frequency of phone scams, if you receive a phone call from someone demanding a ransom for an alleged kidnap victim and you suspect it is a scam, the following course of action should be considered:

Hang up the phone.

Immediately contact family members.

Notify the Ventura Police Department.

Report to the FBI Los Angeles Office at 310-477-6565 or submit an anonymous tip at [online](#).