



City of Arts & Innovation

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Protect Yourself From Fraud Scams During Holiday Season

The Economic Crimes Unit tries to send out a few of these warnings each year. Scam and Fraud season is upon us. We have had several employees contact our unit regarding different scams. Here are a few to watch out for:

Jailed Relative/Friend Scam – The scammer will hack or simply acquire information from email or Social Media accounts. They will assume a person’s identity and then begin sending emails out to the person’s friends stating they need help. Sometimes the scammer will call the victim directly. Often, the scammer will claim to be in jail in a foreign country and requests that the victim send bail money via Western Union or Money Gram ASAP. The scammer will often create an email account very similar to the person whose identity they are using. The scammer will have also acquired some personal information of the person whose identity they stole to help convince the victim it is legitimate.

NEVER send money to **ANYONE** in this scenario. Check with relatives and other friends of the Jailed Relative/Friend to verify they are still in the country. The scammer will make the victim believe that they must send the money immediately. **NOTE:** Once the money has been wire transferred, it is often impossible to recover. In most cases, the scammer is in a foreign country, which prevents law enforcement from contacting/arresting the suspect.

Social Media Scams – These are scams carried out by suspects who target Social Media sites. The suspect will gain access to the site by “friending” and/or other methods. The suspect will take time to research the victim and his/her friends so that a scam tactic can be developed. These scams often start out accusing the family member’s spouse or significant other of some sort of indiscretion. The scammer



will go to great lengths to convince the victim, then ultimately ask for money to be wire transferred. These scams also occur on dating websites and may take the form of a “sweetheart scam.”

Employment Scams: These continue to be popular scams as many people are searching for work. The scammer creates a “Job” ad for a person living somewhere in the U.S. The suspect claims to be a manager of a foreign business. They explain that American customers want to pay by check, but they want to avoid severe fees from foreign transactions. They tell the “employee” that the American customers will send checks to directly to them (the victim) --- the employee is supposed to cash the check and then wire transfer the money to the foreign business. The victim is instructed to retain 5% commission from the check. Of course, the check is counterfeit which the victim’s bank discovers within a week or so --- the victim will be responsible for ALL the money received for the check.

The Bottom Line:

If the scenario seems odd, then it probably is --- trust your instincts and always be skeptical when anyone asks for money. Always check before wire transferring money. If you feel that you may be the target of a scam, **CALL US BEFORE YOU SEND ANY MONEY.** We can advise you on the scenario and check into it further for you.

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