

FRAUD ALERT!

2-8-2010 Update of Grandparents Phone Scam 2-8-2010

In early December, 2009, the Fraud Prevention Taskforce issued a Fraud Alert to warn the public of recent attempts to defraud local grandparents. In this scam, elderly St. Louis residents received telephone calls from individuals who claimed to be Canadian law enforcement officials. The alleged officers stated the resident's grandchild was in Canadian custody and demanded an immediate wire transfer of bail or bond money in order to release him or her. One South County resident was bilked of \$5,800 over two days before discovering her grandson was safely at home with his parents.

This clever scam has persisted in St. Louis in 2010. A midtown resident reported receiving a call on February 3, 2010 informing her that her grandson was in custody in Ontario, Canada and requesting an immediate wire transfer of \$1,914 to secure his release. The caller not only knew the woman's name but even her grandson's name and other information and boldly directed her to complete the wire transfer at the Western Union Office at Salama's Market, 1525 Chouteau.

A young man posing as her grandson then came on the line and begged that she not tell his parents of the arrest and addressed her as "Grandma." The woman then became suspicious- her grandchildren address her as "Momma." She promptly called her grandson's parents and discovered that her grandson was in fact in St. Louis following his normal schedule.

To avoid becoming a victim of this scam, abide by the following guidelines:

1. Make certain the person in custody is indeed your relative. Ask questions only a close family member could answer. Some scammers mine personal information from social networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace.
2. Do not rely on caller ID to verify the call. "Spoofers" can be utilized to make the call appear as though it comes from any source.
3. Be suspicious of any request to wire transfer money. This is the preferred method for criminals the world over.
4. If a "law enforcement officer" claims to have your relative in custody, ask for the officer's name, rank or title, badge or department service number, and police agency. Independently call the agency and ask to speak with the officer.
5. Call the grandchild's parents immediately. They have a right to know about their child.

