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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

New COVID-19 Twist on Common Imposter Scam



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody today issued a Consumer Alert warning Floridians about a new twist on a common scam. For years, scammers have targeted parents and grandparents with phony calls claiming a family member is under arrest. The scammer often spoofs the phone number of a local law enforcement agency, then requests a bail payment to release the family member. Now, there are reports of imposters employing the same scam but using the COVID-19 health crisis to add urgency to an already stressful situation. The scammer claims that due to the health crisis, bail payment must be paid immediately over the phone to reduce person-to-person contact, often implying the relative under arrest may contract COVID-19 while in custody.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, “Scammers are always looking for a new way to repurpose an old trick, and imposter scams are the perfect vehicle to leverage the fear of COVID-19. The added concern of the health risks raised by the scammers in their fake calls only makes an already stressful situation—the supposed arrest of a loved one—even more alarming. It’s despicable, but sadly effective. If you get one of these calls, hang up and call the relative supposedly under arrest directly. Then call law enforcement to report the scam.”

Imposter scams take many different forms and can originate from an email, phone call or text message. Imposter phone calls are effective because spoofing technology allows scammers to change the information displayed on caller IDs to give the appearance that their calls are coming from a government entity.

To avoid falling victim to an imposter scam:

- Do not automatically trust the number listed on the caller ID, especially with respect to unsolicited calls;
- Be wary of any individual who calls or emails asking or demanding a money wire transfer, prepaid debit card or gift card as payment;
- Hang up and contact the appropriate government agency or the apparent requesting entity directly;
- Never provide personal or financial information over the phone or via email in response to an unsolicited communication; and
- Know that law enforcement agencies will never call threatening to arrest you or someone you know unless you provide immediate payment.

Additionally, Attorney General Moody's new Scams at a Glance webpage contains more detailed information and resources for Floridians about identifying and avoiding common imposter scams. To view the Scams at a Glance Imposter Scams brochure online, click here. To view the Imposter Scams brochure in Spanish, click here.

Report any suspicious activity to the Florida Attorney General's Office by calling 1(866) 9NO-SCAM or by visiting MyFloridaLegal.com.

Since the COVID-19 emergency declaration, Attorney General Moody has issued more than 20 Consumer Alerts with information about emerging scams and tips to avoid fraud. To view the latest alerts and to stay up-to-date on COVID-19 related scams, visit the Attorney General's Consumer Alert webpage by clicking here.

For all the Attorney General's COVID-19 related releases and additional COVID-19 tips and resources, click here.

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The Florida Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division issues Consumer Alerts to inform Floridians of emerging scams, new methods used to commit fraud, increased reports of common scams, or any other deceptive practice. Consumer Alerts are designed to notify Floridians about scams and available refunds in an effort to prevent financial losses or other harm caused by deceptive practices. Anyone encountering a scam should report the incident to the Florida Attorney General's Office by calling 1(866) 9NO-SCAM or visiting MyFloridaLegal.com. To view recent Consumer Alerts and for other information about avoiding scams, visit MyFloridaLegal.com/ConsumerAlert.