



Cranford Police Department

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TIPS TO SAFEGUARD AGAINST "HOSTAGE HOAX" OR "BAIL" PHONE SCAMS

The Cranford Police Department is warning residents about the latest phone scams that involve individuals alleging that they have family members held "hostage", or that money is needed to bail a family member out of jail. These scams intend on causing panic and motivating victims to send money through various wire transfer means, including Venmo, Apple Pay, Zelle, Bitcoin, Western Union and even gift cards. Unfortunately, many individuals who fall victim to these types of scam do not recuperate the money that they send. Here are some quick-tips to use if you suspect you are the intended target of a "hostage hoax" or "posting bail" phone scam:

1. Don't say your loved one's name.

Let the scammer use your family member's name first to determine whether they even have that information. In some instances, victims inadvertently supplied family member's names to the scammer.

2. Ask specific questions to the loved one, if the caller will allow you to speak with them.

A kidnapper will most likely put your loved one on the phone so you know that they are serious. If they do, ask them questions that only they would know the answer to (color of their bedroom walls, family pet's name).

3. With bail, call the jurisdiction that allegedly has your family member in custody to verify.

4. Be suspicious if the ransom quickly drops.

Scammers are trying to get any amount of money from you as quickly as they can. If you hesitate, they will likely lower the amount they are asking for in an attempt to get a quick payout and hang up.

5. Use a third-party tracking app.

Especially with children, parents can see where their child is on a map just by putting in each other's phone numbers to discredit the scammer's allegations.

6. Beware of delay tactics.

Scammers go to great lengths to keep you on the phone and try to prevent you from calling or locating the "kidnapped" victim.

7. If scammed or if you believe someone is endangered, call the Cranford Police Department immediately.

Our police department and our County, State, and Federal partners are best trained and situated to handle true missing persons and fraud investigations.



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