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NEWS RELEASE

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Recent scam reported in Norfolk Area.

You're a grandparent, and you get a phone call or an e-mail from someone who identifies himself as your grandson. "I've been arrested in another country," he says, "and need money wired quickly to pay my bail. And oh by the way, don't tell my mom or dad because they'll only get upset!"

This is an example of what's come to be known as "the grandparent scam" by taking advantage of their love and concern for their grandchildren.

Thanks to the Internet and social networking sites, a criminal can sometimes uncover personal information about their targets, which makes the impersonations more believable. For example, the actual grandson may mention on his social networking site that he's a photographer who often travels to Mexico. When contacting the grandparents, the phony grandson will say he's calling from Mexico, where someone stole his camera equipment and passport.

Common scenarios include:

- A grandparent receives a phone call (or sometimes an e-mail) from a "grandchild." If it is a phone call, it's often late at night or early in the morning when most people aren't thinking that clearly. Usually, the person claims to be traveling in a foreign country and has gotten into a bad situation, like being arrested for drugs, getting in a car accident, or being mugged...and needs money wired ASAP. And the caller doesn't want his or her parents told.
- Sometimes, instead of the "grandchild" making the phone call, the criminal pretends to be an arresting police officer, a lawyer, a doctor at a hospital, or some other person.
- Another potential victim includes the family of those serving abroad in our military. After perusing a soldier's social networking site, a con artist will contact the soldier's grandparents, sometimes claiming that a problem came up during military leave that requires money to address.

While it's commonly called the grandparent scam, criminals may also claim to be a family friend, a niece or nephew, or another family member. If you feel that you have been a victim of a scam, you are urged to contact your local law enforcement.

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