Virtual Kidnapping Scam
WHAT IS VIRTUAL KIDNAPPING?

Virtual Kidnapping is a scam in which a victim receives a phone call from someone claiming to have kidnapped a loved one. Parents and grandparents are often the targets of these scams.

SPOTTING A SCAM

These circumstances are indicators the call could be a scam:

- The call is anonymous, and it comes from an outside area code unrelated to the supposed victim’s phone number.
- The caller says the ransom money will only be accepted via wire transfer or gift card.
- The caller attempts to keep you on the phone at all costs — including by telling you that the supposed victim will be harmed if they hear you speaking to anyone else.
- Another type of scam has the caller claiming to be from a government agency. No legitimate government agency will ever call and demand money over the phone, or threaten to arrest you if you refuse to pay.

SCAM PREVENTION

If you do find yourself in this situation, the Irvine Police Department offers the following tips to ensure the safety of you and your family:

- Ask to speak to the victim directly. If this is not allowed, ask the caller to describe the victim, or something unique to your loved one.
- The muffled voice in the background is often an actor in on the scheme — listen very carefully. Does the voice match up to that of the victim?
- Do not offer information about your loved one, including their name, if the caller has not stated it.
- Remember, on many smartphones you can keep a caller on speaker while texting your loved one.
- Before transferring any money, try to get ahold of the supposed victim through social media or text message, or from a different phone.
- Repeat the caller’s demands back to him or her to buy time.

If you have taken the above steps and still believe your loved one is the victim of a kidnapping, call 911 immediately. If you have been the victim of a hoax, call the Irvine Police Department at 949-724-7000.