



## District Attorney's Office • 18<sup>th</sup> Judicial District

George H. Brauchler, District Attorney • Arapahoe, Douglas, Elbert & Lincoln Counties

# Consumer Alert

## Good and Bad News about Phone Extortion Scams

Good news: there has been a noticeable drop-off in harassing, “*you owe the IRS, so pay up or else*” calls that have been circulating in recent years. Last fall, criminals behind IRS imposter scams were busted for running the scheme out of illegal call centers in India, and in the United States. Consumers who reported suspicious IRS phone numbers to law enforcement and to the Federal Trade Commission were instrumental in helping to identify these thieves. But while there is reason to breathe a sigh of relief, this particular “extortion” scam is likely to pop up again. This is true for most scams. Presently, several common extortion scams are making the rounds, and the criminals behind them are using increasingly nasty scare tactics, e.g., threats of arrest; or the threat of harm to a loved one to trick victims into sending money. Many local residents are falling victim to these scams.

### **Extortion scams to be on the lookout for:**

Law enforcement agencies in Arapahoe and Douglas counties are reporting an uptick in ‘kidnap’ extortion scams, whereby families are called by an alleged emergency responder to report that a family member has been badly injured in an accident. The caller is interrupted by another person who exclaims the injured party has been kidnapped and will be harmed if money isn’t immediately sent. “Screams” can sometimes be heard in the background. Sometimes, caller ID’s are “spoofed” to display the name of a local hospital in an effort to scare potential victims into picking up the phone. Common extortion scams include *missed jury duty*, *non-payment of debt* and *grandchild in trouble*.

### **Prevention tips:**

- Don’t answer the phone, especially if you aren’t able to verify the name or number on caller ID, and never send money to the scammer. Extortion scams typically instruct victims to wire money, or load money on a pre-paid card and call in the code. These methods are red flags that are associated with most scams.
- Government agencies such as the IRS or courts **never** call individuals, even if there are concerns. Depending on the agency, they will send written documentation that supports the concerns so that consumers can reasonably and fairly address them.
- For phone threats involving family members, grandchild in trouble, etc., immediately call the person who is allegedly hurt or in trouble to verify what’s going on. Keep phone numbers of family members handy at all times for easy access. And if your caller ID shows a name or phone number of a hospital, call the hospital’s emergency room after validating the correct number from a credible source, such as an official phone book or on-line directory.
- Report all telephone scams to the Federal Trade Commission at 1-877-382-4357 or [www.ftc.org](http://www.ftc.org)

**DA – 18<sup>th</sup> Consumer Protection Line: 720-874-8547**