NASSAU COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT HOMELAND SECURITY

VIRTUAL KIDNAPPING SCAMS

The FBI warns of a recent uptick in Virtual Kidnapping scams across the nation.
Though virtual kidnapping scams have occurred for at least two decades, this scam has recently evolved to exploit new vulnerabilities.

The current abundance of personal information available via social media has created a fertile environment for virtual kidnapping scams. Virtual kidnappers scour the Internet for targets by searching public social media posts to gather specific information about their targets. Scammers then contact the target's loved ones claiming to have taken the target hostage. Family members are coerced into paying a ransom quickly to ensure the target's release. In reality, the target was never in physical danger. By the time the family members realize they have been victimized, the ransom money is gone.

Virtual kidnappers can be very convincing, often representing themselves as members of drug cartels or corrupt law enforcement. Victims may hear screams in the background of a call, but virtual kidnappers have been known to use recordings to sound more realistic. Virtual kidnappers often demand payment via wire transfer and push victims to act quickly.

Hallmarks of a virtual kidnapping include:

A family member receives a call indicating that a child has been or will be kidnapped. In some cases, the call may come from a known number through the use of Spoofing.

- Callers go to great lengths to keep victims on the phone
- Callers are usually unable to answer simple questions about targets.
- Ransom money is demanded immediately and only accepted via a wire transfer service Cash App or Pre-paid Money Cards.

NCPD offers the following tips to help prevent being the victim of a virtual kidnapping scam:

- Keep Social Media accounts Private. Only accept vetted friends.
- Never post news of upcoming travel dates and locations online.
- Discuss virtual kidnapping with family members.
- Have a "password" that family members can ask for in an emergency to confirm that a loved one is really in trouble.
- Be wary of providing financial information to strangers over the phone / Internet.

Immediately call 911 if you believe you are being targeted by a virtual kidnapping scam.

SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING – KNOW SOMETHING, DO SOMETHING

For Immediate police response always call 911.