



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

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

# Fraud Alert

## 'Virtual Kidnapping' Scam Targets Mexican Residents

The Aurora Police Department has recently received a rash of kidnapping extortion scams targeting Mexican nationals who currently live in Aurora. In what has been described as a terrifying phone call, a caller with an unidentified Mexican phone number warns a family member that a son, daughter, or other loved one has been kidnapped and will likely be killed unless a ransom is paid. The caller almost always talks fast and deliberately keeps the family member on the phone for as long as possible so as to prevent him/her from calling the alleged victim. The family member is then instructed to wire money to a destination somewhere in Mexico and the perpetrator may call back several times with escalating threats and more demands for money. After following the caller's threats as instructed, the family member eventually discovers that the victim purportedly being held ransom is safe and unaware that he/she has been used as "bait" in the hoax.

Similar *pay-up or else* phone threats are in wide circulation and are effective in scaring innocent victims into sending money. The 'virtual kidnapping' scam targeting Mexican nationals is particularly alarming, given its relatedness to real-life situations associated with drug and other crime rings in Mexico, and why victims are more likely to be taken in this scam. According to the Aurora Police Department and FBI, blackmailers often use social networking sites such as Facebook to identify families and the relationships of family members to one another; and to manipulate the information families post on these sites, such as full names, birthdates, hobbies, etc., to enhance the threat's credibility.

### Protect Yourself:

- Place all family members on speed dial so that if such a call comes through, a call or text message to the targeted victim can be immediately sent. Consider establishing a code within the family, such as a text, emoticon, word or phrase that would notify family members of the extortion attempt, or in turn, that the alleged victim is safe.
- The FBI recommends finding ways of stalling the caller in order to speed dial the intended victim by slowing the conversation down and asking questions. One strategy is to ask the caller to repeat the demand so you can write the information down. Ask to speak to the victim.
- Finally, consider limiting the personal information you post about family members on social networking sites, and instruct families to do so as well.

If you receive this call, contact Sgt. Courtenay, Aurora Police Department at 303-739-6094.

**18<sup>th</sup> Judicial Consumer Fraud Protection Line: 720-874-8547**