PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE
COMMUNITY AWARENESS BULLETIN
CAB 003-13 December 10,

HOSTAGE PHONE SCAM

As of 11/19/2013, law enforcement officials in Central Pennsylvania have identified at least six victims that received phone calls stating their relative was in danger. The callers have stated the relative was either taken hostage or involved in a minor accident. During the course of the calls, the suspect told the victim they must pay $2,000 or their relative will be harmed. The callers possessed some background information on the victims and in one incident, knew the victims' brother's name, work location and cell phone number.

- A woman from Philadelphia received a phone call on her cellular phone stating that her father had been in an accident, refused to provide insurance information, and was being held hostage at gunpoint until the caller received $1,000 to pay for the damage to his vehicle.[1]
- York County residents received calls stating that their relative had been taken hostage or had been involved in a crash. The residents were told to pay $2,000 or their relative would be harmed.[2]

Investigations into the various incidents have determined the calls originated from Puerto Rico and were made using a pre-paid cellular phone. Although the calls emanate from outside the continental United States, the caller ID on the victim's phone typically displays a local number. These "hostage" phone calls have occurred throughout the United States.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Be suspicious of any stranger who calls and asks for money, regardless of the situation or stated reason.
- Never provide strangers with personal information such as your social security number, birth date, credit card numbers, or address.
- Do not wire or transfer money to unknown individuals.
- **If you receive a suspicious phone call, contact your local law enforcement agency immediately.**

[1] Morran, Chris. (2013, December 5). Phone scammers tell woman they have her Dad hostage (Spoiler: They're Lying). Consumerist.com. Retrieved on 12/09/2013 from: http://consumerist.com/2013/12/05/phone-scammers-tell-woman-they-have-her-dad-hostage-spoiler-theyre-lying/.
[2] York Daily Record. (2013, December 4). Police warn of 'hostage' phone scam. York Daily Record. Retrieved on 12/09/2013 from: http://www.ydr.com/crime/ci_24654165/police-warn-hostage-phone-scam.