

January 27, 2009

GRANDPARENT SCAM RESURFACES

BISMARCK – Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem today warned North Dakotans of imposters calling senior citizens identifying themselves as their grandchild and requesting money for an emergency situation. The con artist asks the grandparent to wire money to Canada for the fees or fines the alleged grandchild has to pay to be released from jail or to re-enter the United States.

In one recent call, the fake “grandchild” was crying very hard because he had been arrested in Canada and needed money for bail. The targeted victim did not recognize the voice and was wary until the caller asked “Grandma, do you know who this is”? At that point, the grandmother asked, “Is this Sam?” The caller then had the grandchild’s name. Pretending to be her grandchild he told her he had been arrested and the authorities had taken his passport and credit cards so he had no way to make bail. She was instructed to go to the nearest Western Union or Money Gram and wire \$2,900 to him in Canada. Fortunately, she recognized some red flags, contacted other family members, and determined her grandson was not in Canada.

Stenehjem cautions consumers of red flags to help detect a scam:

- Do not fill in the blanks for the caller. They do not know the names of the grandchildren, but are relying on their victim to provide that information. Ask them to give their name to you. If you do not provide them any information, they will likely hang up.
- Verify the whereabouts of family members by calling other family members or the grandchild they claim to be. Do not use phone numbers provided by the caller.
- Never send money unless you have verified that your relative is really in trouble.
- Never give out personal identifying information such as bank account or credit card account numbers to anyone you do not know.

Unfortunately, once the money is wired, it is nearly impossible to recover. Consumer Protection Director Parrell Grossman cautioned citizens to check with local law enforcement or call the Consumer Protection Division, toll free, at 1-800-472-2600 before wiring money outside the country.

###