

VIPD Warns Seniors About Prize Scam Demanding MoneyGram Transfers, Gift Cards and Checks

VIPD says scammers are targeting seniors by claiming they won a truck, car or cash, then demanding insurance, tax or processing fees through MoneyGram, gift cards, bank withdrawals or checks, sometimes involving other deceived seniors as go-betweens.

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The V.I. Police Department is warning senior citizens and caregivers across the territory about a phone scam in which callers falsely claim that older adults have won a prize, then demand money before the supposed prize can be released.

According to VIPD, fraudsters, both men and women, have been targeting seniors through landline and cell phone calls.

Police say the scammers tell victims they have won a prize such as a truck, car or cash. The victim is then told that various fees must be paid first, including insurance, taxes or processing fees.

Victims are instructed to send money through MoneyGram, purchase gift cards, or withdraw money from their bank and transfer the funds to the scammer.

In some cases, police say the scammer gives the victim a name and mailing address and instructs the person to write and mail a check. Investigations have found that the person at the listed address is often another senior citizen who has also been deceived.

That person is then instructed by the scammer to cash the check and forward the money, while believing they are helping facilitate the delivery of legitimate prize winnings.

VIPD said the fraudulent scheme often continues until victims have lost significant amounts of money or exhausted their savings.

Police are advising anyone who receives one of these calls to hang up immediately and avoid engaging in conversation with the caller. Victims are also urged to inform a trusted family member or caregiver about the call and to never send money, purchase gift cards, or provide personal or financial information to anyone claiming they have won a prize.

Family members and caregivers are being encouraged to check in regularly with elderly loved ones. If a senior mentions receiving a call about winning a prize or gift, police said they should be reassured that it is a scam.

Caregivers and relatives are also encouraged to review financial activity where appropriate, because some seniors may genuinely believe the caller is legitimate and may not immediately disclose financial losses.

Anyone who believes they have been targeted or victimized by the scam is encouraged to contact their local police department and report the incident as soon as possible.

For more information, the public may call VIPD's Economic Crimes Unit at 340-774-3942 ext. 5618.