



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Senator Lanza Issues Consumer Alert Warning Staten Islanders of the "Grandparent Scam" & Reminds Residents About Tomorrow's Special Education Fair

ANDREW J LANZA March 8, 2012

Tomorrow, Friday, March 9th at 10:00 a.m. Senator Lanza will be hosting his Annual Special Education Fair bringing over 50 groups together to share information about city, state and local programs designed to help children and adults with special needs. The fair will run from 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. at the Jewish Community Center of Staten Island located at 1466 Manor Road in Sea View. If you or anyone you know cares for someone with special needs please pass this information on.

Further, a report released today as part of National Consumer Protection Week found that elderly victims across New York lost more than \$441,000 over the last several months to scammers pretending to be family members in need. According to the Attorney General's office there has been a reported rise in so-called "grandparent scams," where perpetrators impersonate relatives in need, and then dupe unsuspecting seniors into sending them money.

It's despicable that these scammers are preying on the vulnerability and generosity of senior citizens who are duped into thinking they are helping out a family member in need. These dishonest individuals are trying to steal money from seniors. Senator Lanza's office is committed to alerting and educating New Yorkers by making sure they are aware of these imposters before they strike again.

There are several scenarios in which the scam takes place over the phone:

Seniors will receive an unexpected call from someone who claims to be a friend or relative. A typical scenario targets grandparents with the caller claiming to be their grandson or granddaughter. The caller says there is an emergency and asks victim to send money immediately. For example, they might say, "I'm in Canada and I'm trying to get home but my car broke down and I need money right away to get it fixed." Or they may claim to have been mugged, or been in a

car accident, or need money for bail or to pay customs fees to get back into the United States from another country. They may also pose as an attorney or law enforcement official contacting a potential victim on behalf of a friend or relative.

Typically, the caller says they are embarrassed about what has happened to them, and asks the grandparent not to tell anyone else in the family.

A scammer pretends to know the names of a victim's friends or relatives, however, in some cases they don't. For example, the scammer may say "Hi grandma," hoping that she actually has a grandson. If she asks, "David, is that you?" the scammer will say "Yes!" Often these crooks will call in the middle of the night and take advantage of the fact that one may not be alert enough to ask more questions, and the victim may not want to disturb other people by calling them to confirm the information. Sometimes the scammers *do* know the names of one's friends or relatives, as they can obtain that information from a variety of sources.

Scammers contact people randomly through a variety of methods. They also use marketing lists, telephone listings and information from social networking sites, obituaries and other sources. Sometimes, they hack into people's email accounts and send messages to everyone in their contact list.

TIPS TO AVOID BECOMING A VICTIM OF FRAUD:

If you realize you've been scammed, what can you do? These scammers ask you to send money through services such as Western Union and MoneyGram because they can pick it up quickly, in cash. They often use phony IDs, so it's impossible to trace them. Contact the money transfer service immediately to report the scam. If the money hasn't been picked up yet, you can retrieve it, but if it has, it's not like a check that you can stop – the money is gone.

How can you protect yourself? If you get a call or email from someone claiming to know you and asking for help, check to confirm that it's legitimate before you send any money. Ask some questions that would be hard for an imposter to answer correctly – the name of the person's pet, for example, or the date of their mother's birthday. Contact the person who they claim to be directly. If you can't reach the person, contact someone else – a friend or relative of the person. Don't send money unless you're sure it's the real person.

If you feel you've been a victim of this type of scam or any other type of consumer fraud, contact my office at (718) 984-4073 or the Attorney General's Consumer Helpline at (800) 771-7755.