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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COMMUNITY ALERT

“Virtual Kidnapping” Scam

The Beverly Hills Police Department is alerting Beverly Hills residents of an ongoing nationwide scam involving “Virtual Kidnapping” extortion attempts. During these incidents, an unidentified person calls and claims to have kidnapped a family member. To increase legitimacy, sometimes another person, claiming to be the kidnap victim is initially on the line asking for help, giving the impression that the family member has truly been kidnapped. The alleged kidnapper takes over the phone call and requests ransom money by way of a wire transfer or a cash. The “kidnapper” goes to great lengths to keep the call-taker on the phone and does not allow the call-taker to speak to the alleged kidnap victim again. In these cases it is later discovered that there has been no kidnapping and the alleged kidnap victim is completely unaware of the situation.

To avoid becoming a victim, look for these indicators that the incoming call is a scam:

- The incoming call is from an international or blocked phone number.
- The caller does not know the name of the person they have kidnapped (“*I kidnapped your daughter.*”)
- The caller claims to have ties to organized crime.
- The caller will not let you speak with the alleged kidnap victim.
- The caller demands that you stay on the phone and will not allow you to make other calls.
- The caller will not allow you to call him/her back.
- The caller demands ransom money by way of wire transfer to an international account, or provides you instructions to deliver cash to a specific location.
- The caller does not request a specific dollar amount and instead asks you what you have available (“*How much do you have, right now?*”).
- The caller seems willing to accept a small amount as ransom.

If you receive such a call, the following course of action should be considered:

1. Hang up the phone.
2. Contact family members.
3. Notify law enforcement.

If you believe you have been a victim of a Virtual Kidnapping scam, notify your local law enforcement agency.

The Beverly Hills Police Department investigates all reports received of this nature.

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