

Subject: School Safety Incident Alert

Good afternoon to all, the Maryland Center for School Safety is providing you with the below situational awareness information pertaining to a recent school safety incident that occurred within the greater National Capital Region.

The Catholic Schools Office of the Archdiocese of Washington became aware of a disturbing scam being conducted via telephone recently. An unidentified individual called parents, claiming to have kidnapped a child of theirs, and demanded ransom.

In both cases, one involving a parent at an archdiocesan school, and the other a parent at a local private school it was determined the claims were false, with the children being safe and accounted for. In one of the cases, the caller purported to put the kidnapped child on the phone and have her ask for help.

According to open source information, The Archdiocese of Washington confirmed that an unknown subject in the last couple of days called a parent of a child who attends one of 63 archdiocesan schools in the Washington, DC region and claimed they had kidnapped their child.

The caller demanded a ransom. No money exchanged hands because the parent determined the call was a fake. Their child was safe and accounted for. The incident was reported to local law enforcement and they advised of a second, similar incident which occurred at an independent, private school unrelated to the Archdiocese.

News4 Washington DC reports the scams are hitting different regions, including the Archdiocese of Washington, Prince William County, Virginia, and George Mason University. Attached is the link to the News4 story. <http://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/Virtual-Kidnapping-Scam-Strikes-Schools-Residents-379887541.html>.

These type of incidents are known as virtual kidnapping. A virtual kidnapping is an extortion scheme, in which a criminal demands money from a victim by phone while pretending to hold a family member/loved one captive. The perpetrator/caller states they will only release the person being held captive after receiving payment.

The caller will attempt to keep victim on the line, urging speed and not allowing them to speak with anyone else. The incident generally starts out with a frantic call from an unfamiliar voice, telling you someone you know has been kidnapped and is in danger.

The perpetrator(s) use social media prior to placing the call to learn more about their victims, where they live, places they commonly visit, and connected friends.

When the call is placed, they claim to be holding the loved one's cell phone, saying if you try to contact your loved one, you're jeopardizing their life. The only way your loved one will be released without harm is if you pay the ransom money via wire transfer service.

The FBI has been warning citizens as to this relatively new safety concern. Below is the link to an FBI Public Education Bulletin as to virtual kidnapping <https://www.fbi.gov/newyork/press-releases/2015/virtual-kidnapping-scam-on-the-rise-in-new-york-city>.

This information is being shared with you so you may be able to inform your school administrators, school staff, school resource officers, and most importantly your parent community as to this new and emerging school safety concern.

Please encourage your parent community to promptly notify school administrators and local law enforcement if they are the victim of a virtual kidnapping or similar scam.

In addition, we would ask that you also promptly notify us at the Maryland Center for School Safety of any such incidents so we can track these incidents and also share the information with our school safety partners at the Maryland Coordination and Analysis Center (MCAC).

A special thanks goes to Mr. Mike Wyant, Security Director for St. Mary's County Public Schools for bringing this matter to our attention and to Mr. William Ryan, Superintendent of Schools for the Archdiocese of Washington for discussing this important matter with us and for sharing key information regarding the incident. We also want to thank Mr. Tom Alban, Director, Risk Management, Archdiocese of Baltimore for his outreach to the Archdiocese of Washington so we could learn more information as to the incident.

We have invited Superintendent Ryan to join our weekly school safety conference calls.

This situation is just another great example of the value of sharing key school safety information among our state-wide and National Capital Region school safety partners so we all can be better informed to respond and address school safety concerns impacting our schools and communities.

Thanks to everyone for your unwavering commitment to keeping our students safe so they can obtain a high quality education in a safe environment.

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