Board of Chosen Freeholders
County of Hunterdon
71 Main Street, Building #1
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MEDIA RELEASE

Hunterdon County Officials: Scam Tactics Targeting Seniors Is Elder Abuse

Participants at the World Elder Abuse Awareness Day program sponsored by the Hunterdon County Human Services Department, learned that elder abuse is not just physical or mental abuse, but also includes exploitation through fraudulent scams targeting the senior community.

Earlier this year, Hunterdon County Sheriff Fred W. Brown acted swiftly to warn and protect residents, many of whom were senior citizens, from a phone scam seeking a monetary payment to avoid a fake arrest warrant. Due to Sheriff Brown's efforts, hundreds of potential victims were warned and spared being scammed.

Recently, however, there has been an uptick in fraudulent scam calls with even more sophisticated tactics design to fool the public, particularly senior citizens.

Freeholder Board Deputy Director Suzanne Lagay, the Board's Liaison to the Department of Human Services, who participated in the Elder Abuse Awareness program, said, "The scams are becoming an epidemic. It is important for the public, particularly our senior citizens, to be educated to avoid these traps."

"In most cases," Freeholder Board Deputy Director Lagay added, "compliance in such scams is not a lack of intelligence or awareness, but rather the cleverness of the culprits' pitch and sophisticated use of technology that becomes threatening and believable. Always report suspicious requests-usually involving forwarding money or regarding a loved one's safety-to the police before acting."

A NJ.com report pointed out that hackers have become more assertive with their efforts in trying to steal money through deceptions designed to obtain private information. To read the full story, copy and paste the following web address into your browser:
https://www.nj.com/politics/index.ssf/2015/11/state_officials_warn_of_new_senior_scams.html

Some of the scam artist tactics include intimidation, bullying, false IRS threats, and use of fake Medicare calls to elicit private information. Scam callers give instructions on how to get the money and may even be so bold as to arrange a meeting at the victim's home.

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Division Head of the Division of Social Work Services, Susan Nekola, said, "It is alarming to hear about the tactics used by scammers, this truly is Elder Abuse. Exploitation in this county is escalating, and is often in conjunction with other abuse types. Neglect and exploitation of elderly family members often occur together."

Ms. Nekola reported, "Adult Protective Services (APS) investigates referrals of the abuse, neglect and exploitation of vulnerable adults, 18 and over, residing in our community. In 2017, APS received 300 referrals, the most we have ever had. Education and information are the best way to avoid losing money or property to anyone who threatens you over the phone."

There are several online sources of help for residents. New Jersey's Consumer Affairs website has an 'Anti-Fraud Tool-Kit' to help the Elderly and their family navigate the different scams out there and what to do to stay protected. NJCA website: https://www.njconsumeraffairs.gov/fightingfraud/Pages/default.aspx.

For the latest Federal information, visit https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/features/scam-alerts.

Residents who have concerns about suspicious calls, or contacts made to their senior citizens friends or relatives, should contact their local police departments to report potential fraud. For questions relating to scams, residents can contact Hunterdon County Sheriff Fred W. Brown at 908-788-1166 or the Prosecutor's Office at 908-788-1129.

Those with concerns about suspect Medicare calls should contact Medicare directly at 800-333-4114.