



**Department  
of Commerce**

## **Ohio Division of Securities Investor Alert**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Have Grandchildren? Don't Fall for this Scam**

**Columbus, Ohio** - The so-called “grandparent scam” is simple but effective because it relies on older adults who want to help their grandchildren, especially in times of crisis. But your good intentions could allow a thief to steal your hard-earned money.

These scammers can get information about you and your relatives from social media sites like Facebook, so don't be fooled if a suspicious caller uses details from your life or that of a relative.

The scam works like this: an older person gets a phone call and the scammer will quickly say, “Hi grandma (or granddad), do you know who this is?” The unsuspecting grandparent may guess and use the name of a grandchild, which allows the scammer to immediately establish a fake relationship.

The “fake” grandchild will tell a convincing story, such as being arrested while overseas or on spring break, or their car broke down or they're short on rent this month. Anything that sounds like a crisis in need of immediate financial rescue. At the same time, the scam artist will beg the grandparent to not tell the fake child's parents for fear of punishment or embarrassment.

The scammer – or sometimes a second scammer posing as a police officer or lawyer – will ask for money to solve the unexpected financial problem. The scammer then asks be paid via Western Union, Money Pak's “Green Dot” rechargeable cards, or a MoneyGram, most of which don't require identification to collect. Some of these thieves are now asking for gift cards from Apple iTunes, Amazon or other businesses as payment. Amounts range from hundreds to thousands of dollars!

#### **Tips to Avoid Being Scammed**

If you receive a suspicious phone call from someone claiming to be a relative, use these tactics to avoid being ripped off:

- Keep in touch regularly with your relatives so you're not surprised to learn they are out of town or away at college, etc.
- Ask the caller questions only the grandchild would know the answers to, such as the name of a family pet or where their parents work.
- Ask the caller for their phone number and tell them you'll call back. Chances are they won't give you a number, but if they do, check out the grandchild's story with other relatives.

- Although it may be possible to transfer money via legitimate services like Western Union or MoneyGram, if the caller wants to be paid by gift cards or similar methods, it's a scam.
- Contact your relatives and alert them to this scam to help ensure other family members don't become victims.
- Keep a list of phone numbers and resources you can turn to, including the local police, or your bank if money has been taken from your accounts.
- Report suspicious activity to local authorities so that they can take action to help others from becoming a victim.

Don't allow these thieves to steal your money. By taking a few simple steps beforehand, you can avoid becoming another victim to these scam artists.

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### **About the Ohio Division of Securities**

The Ohio Division of Securities (ODS) administers the Ohio Securities Act by licensing securities salespersons, dealers, investment advisers, and investment adviser representatives. The Division also registers securities offered for sale to Ohioans. Additionally, the ODS investigates alleged violations of the Ohio Securities Act and enforces its provisions through administrative actions, civil injunctive actions and criminal prosecutions.

To avoid potential financial fraud, investors are encouraged to call the Division's Investor Protection Hotline at 877-683-7841 before they invest money and ask:

- Is the brokerage firm and salesperson licensed to sell securities in Ohio?
- Have any enforcement actions been taken against them?
- Has the security been properly registered with the Division of Securities?

For more information on how to avoid securities fraud or to report a scam, contact the Ohio Division of Securities at 614-644-7381.