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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

AG Moody Announces Arrest of Six Fraudsters for Stealing Nearly \$250,000 From Seniors Through Grandparent Scams



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody’s Office of Statewide Prosecution today announced the arrest of six fraudsters for stealing nearly \$250,000 from Florida seniors through grandparent scams. The Miami-Dade Police Department’s Vice Intelligence Squad reports that the defendants contacted seniors posing as lawyers or legal representatives of one of the victim’s grandchildren. The fraudsters told the targets that the grandchildren were arrested after hitting a pregnant woman with a vehicle and needed bail money, then arranged for the victim to send payment.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, “These fraudsters know that most grandparents would do anything to help a grandchild in need, and through a convincing imposter scheme they used fear and family to extort Florida seniors—stealing nearly a quarter of a million dollars. Working with our great law enforcement partners in South Florida, we were able to shut down this far-reaching grandparent scheme and now six fraudsters will have to answer for their crimes.”

Miami-Dade Police Department Director Stephanie V. Daniels said, “I am immensely proud of the Miami-Dade Police Department’s Vice Intelligence Squad, for their exceptional collaboration with the Florida Attorney General, and federal agencies in successfully apprehending individuals involved in extorting the elderly population. Their dedication, expertise,

and unwavering commitment to protecting our community's most vulnerable population are truly commendable.”

After telling the targets the falsified story about the grandchildren in jail, the fraudsters pressured seniors to provide bail money. According to the investigation, the defendants directed the victims to obtain the bail amount in cash, then place it into a box to be picked up by a courier. The couriers—unknowing ride-share drivers booked by the criminals—picked up the cash and transported the money back to the scammers at an arranged rendezvous spot.

In a few instances, the scammers contacted the same victim multiple times pressuring for more cash. In one instance, a Palm Bay victim made an initial bond payment of \$9,000, but fraudsters told the victim that the pregnant woman miscarried and the grandchild required an additional \$18,000 because authorities upgraded the charges. The defendants then told the same victim the baby’s father attacked the senior’s grandson for causing the miscarriage, and during the course of the attack the grandchild elbowed a police officer, causing an additional \$20,000 needed for bail, as well as \$7,500 in court fees. The victim ended up paying the fraudsters more than \$54,000. Nearly identical events happened to a Melbourne victim, who paid \$53,000 to the criminal group.

In another case, a Sarasota victim sent \$8,000 and the fraudsters called back the next day saying the pregnant woman lost the child and requested another \$4,000 for bail. The day after that, the defendants claimed the grandson owed medical bills due to the accident and required another \$1,700.

A victim in Pompano paid \$30,000 for bail and later sent an additional \$7,000 because the fraudsters claimed the pregnant woman died and the bond increased.

These defendants preyed upon seniors in multiple counties, including Brevard, Broward, Lee, Miami-Dade, Orange, Palm Beach and Sarasota. The Miami-Dade Police Department, Sunny Isles Beach Police Department, Lee County Sheriff’s Office, Brevard Sheriff’s Office, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Boca Raton Police Department, North Port Police Department, Broward County Sheriff’s Office, Palm Bay Police Department, Jupiter Police Department, Manatee County Sheriff’s Office and West Palm Beach Police Department partnered together on the investigation.

All six defendants, Jairo Izquierdo, Gennesis Castro, Wendy Angelina Ortiz, Ada Tido, Wandy Castro and Olfa Cornielle, face multiple first-degree felonies, including organized scheme to defraud, grand theft, criminal use of personal identification and more.

Attorney General Moody’s Office of Statewide Prosecution will prosecute this case.

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