



# PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE

## COMMUNITY AWARENESS BULLETIN

CAB 002-2021

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### GIFT CARD SCAMS

The Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) is reminding Pennsylvania residents to be vigilant about scams involving gift cards. The PSP is aware of several variations on scams in which the scammer claims the victim has a problem that must be solved immediately and that payment in gift cards is required to solve it. Some of these variations include:

- Claims of problems such as outstanding warrants, tax debts, or utility bills.
- Claims that a relative is visiting overseas and needs money to pay a hospital bill or bail. This is frequently called the "grandparent scam."
- Claims to be collecting gift cards for charity.
- Promises of employment in exchange for payment. These jobs do not exist or may involve illegal activities.
- Requests sent by email or text from a friend for a "favor" to purchase gift cards with claims that the "friend" will pay the victim back.

In each of these scams, the scammer requests payment in gift cards because they are widely available in many denominations, untraceable, and only the information on the back of the card is needed to redeem it. Once the cards are purchased, the scammer will instruct the victim to read the information over the phone or take a photo of the back of the card and text the photo to the scammer.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Government agencies do not accept gift cards for payment of taxes or other debts. They also send notifications of such debts in writing. Ignore anyone who claims you owe a debt that must be repaid with gift cards.
- If someone claims to be collecting gift cards for charity, contact the charity directly to verify the request.
- If someone who claims to know you asks for gift cards as a favor or to get out of trouble, contact that person directly to verify the situation. It is most likely a scam and the person may have to report possible identity theft or change a hacked password.
- More information about gift card scams can be found at the Federal Trade Commission's website at <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/paying-scammers-gift-cards>.
- The Pennsylvania Department of Banking and Securities is partnering with the Pennsylvania Food Merchants Association (PFMA) to provide training for store employees to identify and prevent seniors from becoming victims of gift card scams. More information is available at [https://www.media.pa.gov/Pages/banking\\_details.aspx?newsid=329](https://www.media.pa.gov/Pages/banking_details.aspx?newsid=329).
- The free *See Something, Send Something* smartphone application enables individuals to report suspicious activity by capturing a photograph, screenshot, and other information to send it directly to the Pennsylvania State Police. Tips may also be sent to [tips@pa.gov](mailto:tips@pa.gov).



**PSP reminds residents who fall victim to a scam to report it to their local police department.**