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LAW DIRECTOR ADVISORY **Local Business Caller ID Scams**

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Recently, we have again received reports of residents who have received scam phone calls with recognizable local caller IDs. Specifically, a resident's caller ID showed an incoming call from Cox Communications. However, when she answered the phone, the caller was actually someone trying to tell her that her computer had suffered a power outage, and that she needed to let them access her information on the computer. Fortunately, this resident knew that this was a scam and hung up the phone.

This practice is called "spoofing" and allows anyone, from anywhere, to mask their actual number with another phone number. This effectively creates the illusion that the person calling or texting you is a legitimate business or person within your area that you can trust. By using a reputable name, the scammers can run successful operations resulting in the theft of money, information, or both. Here are some tips for avoiding falling victim to the scam:

1. Don't pick up calls from unknown numbers.

While many call scams are spoofing numbers, often they will be random numbers within your area code. If you don't recognize the number, have them leave a message or ignore it.

2. Call companies back at numbers you know to be reliable.

If you receive a call from a local company and it strikes you as suspicious, see if you can verify the number from another source. Whether it be a mailer, a bill, a receipt, a neighbor, or their own website; anything that you know to be a legitimate source that can confirm that the number is accurate. Once you have a number that you know to be accurate, call them back and see if they called you. If they are asking for personal information or making claims that require you to divulge personal information, hang up and call a verified number to confirm it is them before continuing. More often than not, the companies should know whatever information is relevant to providing you support, as they would have gotten that when you signed up for services or purchased products, etc.

3. Put yourself on a "do not call" registry.

Donotcall.gov is a registry that prevents you from receiving telemarketing calls. After you have signed your number up for the database, any telemarketing calls that come 31 days afterwards are reportable to the Federal Trade Commission at the same website. Note: No one from the National Do Not Call Registry will call you, that is another scam.

4. Change your phone number.

As a last-ditch effort, if you continue to get spoofed, you can get a new phone number from your carrier, often at no charge. While this may be a hassle, it may be necessary if you are being incessantly harassed by scam callers.