



## Better Business Bureau® Senior Awareness Initiative **Hang Up on Tax Relief Scammers**

Better Business Bureau® Serving Greater Cleveland (BBB®) is warning consumers to look out for tax debt relief scams during the upcoming tax season. While there are legitimate companies specializing in tax debt relief services, tax debt relief scammers may contact consumers regarding unpaid tax bills in an attempt to scare them to solicit an immediate payment. Other times, scammers may advertise payment plans or that they are able to settle with the IRS for "[pennies on the dollar](#)." [Some taxpayers who filed complaints with the Federal Trade Commission \(FTC\) reported](#) that, after signing up with some of these companies and paying thousands of dollars in upfront fees, the companies took even more of their money by making unauthorized charges to their credit cards or withdrawals from their bank accounts. Other times, scammers may be trying to solicit personally identifiable information (PII) information from victims, such as Social Security numbers and date of birth, since this information can be used to file taxes and obtain refunds

Recently, a consumer from Parma reported to BBB in early March about harassing voicemails she has been receiving concerning tax debt relief. The consumer told BBB that she receives calls from "Tax Debt Relief" multiple times a day, from multiple numbers. "This is a nuisance. The phone numbers are throughout the United States...I have called the numbers back to tell them to stop calling. I am told they will take me off the list but they continue to call. This has been going on since mid-January." The consumer also reported the phone calls to the Parma Police Department and has attempted to block all numbers the scammers are calling on to no avail. The consumer also told BBB that she is not aware of any unpaid taxes and has received no letters regarding an unpaid debt from the IRS.

The IRS advises taxpayers who owe taxes or think they do to [view tax account information online](#) at IRS.gov or call the IRS at 800-829-1040. To find out more information about how to obtain an Identity Protection Pin or to enable facial recognition on logins, [visit their website here](#).

If individuals have spotted a scam (whether or not they've lost money), they can report it to [BBB.org/ScamTracker](#). These reports can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Consumers can also visit the Scam Tracker website to view the latest reported scams in their neighborhood or across North America.



## Better Business Bureau® Senior Awareness Initiative **Scammers Targeting Owners of Stolen Kias and Hyundais**

Thefts of Kia and Hyundai vehicles are surging in Northeast Ohio. The thefts, which exploit a steering wheel column vulnerability in certain model years, have been part of a worldwide TikTok trend that has been keeping law enforcement on their toes. Many local police departments, such as the cities of Cleveland, Westlake, and Fairview Park, have even resorted to providing steering wheel locks to their residents to help thwart crime. Scammers are using this spike in crime to target consumers who have been the victim of stolen car thefts.

A local woman contacted Better Business Bureau® Serving Greater Cleveland (BBB®) after an experience with online scammers targeting victims of stolen cars. The woman told BBB that “a company called Car Tracking Team contacted me through Facebook because I had posted that my daughter’s Kia Forte 2017 was stolen. The company offered to find my daughter’s car within 2 hours for \$126. There were (supposed) to be no other fees unless a tow was needed. I paid through Cash App. After, waiting over 2 hours, I reached out to a guy named Chris Williams. He called me and told me that I have to pay another \$86 to find my car. That was not the agreement nor was I ever informed of additional fees.” The woman never found her daughter’s vehicle this way and was never provided a refund. Additionally, the woman discovered that there is no way to track a stolen vehicle unless a tracking device was previously installed.

BBB is providing the following tips to consumers who may be at risk of vehicle thefts or scams targeting car owners.

- **Find out if your [car is at-risk of being stolen](#).** Not all years and models of Kia and Hyundai vehicles are affected. Those models with built-in immobilizers or “push start” ignition systems are not at risk.
- **Install a vehicle immobilizer, a steering wheel lock, and a GPS tracking device.** Consider purchasing and installing one or more of these items to deter thefts. A GPS tracking system won’t prevent theft but will make the car’s location more easily traceable.
- **Know if your car has GPS tracking and how to use it.** If you have questions if your vehicle has GPS tracking, contact your vehicle’s manufacturer, car manual, or dealer. Many GPS tracking devices can also be purchased as aftermarket kits so make sure you have that company’s contact information if the car ever goes missing.
- **Contact the local police immediately.** If your vehicle is stolen, contact your local police department immediately and provide them with details such as the make, model, year, color, and VIN in addition to any GPS tracking information.
- **Park in a locked garage or an area that has working surveillance cameras.** If this isn’t an option, consider installing a high-resolution surveillance camera.
- **Don’t leave valuables in a car.** Don’t give would-be car thieves additional incentives to steal your vehicle. Leave valuables in a secure location or not easily visible from the outside.



## Better Business Bureau® Senior Awareness Initiative Diving into the Deepfake World of Grandparent Scams

Scammers are taking a new twist on old scams by incorporating artificial intelligence into their schemes. Better Business Bureau® (BBB®) has [previously reported on “deepfake” scams](#) and new technology, [such as voice, video, and artificial intelligence \(AI\) software](#), being used to perpetuate fraud. BBB they received through a secondary method, such as a phone call or email. Now that simple advice is no longer enough.

Recently, the [Federal Trade Commission \(FTC\) released a report](#) about scammers specifically targeting family members using voice cloning technology. It’s a new twist on the “Grandparent Scam.” The Grandparent Scam is a well-known extortion scheme involving a telephone call or message from someone posing as a grandchild who has gotten into trouble. Oftentimes, these are traffic accidents, medical issues, or legal problems. Callers will plead for the recipient not to tell their mom and dad and to send them money immediately.

Scammers often use the name, nicknames, and likenesses of grandchildren based on information pulled from social media posts. New scams are taking this process one step further and are using audio clips from videos uploaded on Instagram and TikTok to create new content in voice-cloning programs. These cloned audio pieces sound like the real person and can easily trick an unsuspecting victim.

BBB is providing the following advice for consumers who may be at risk of receiving a grandparent scam call:

- **Confirm Identities** - Make sure you know who you are speaking with. Since deepfake and AI technology have progressed so far, so quickly, use different and multiple methods to confirm a loved one’s identity. Make phone calls to known numbers and send messages to confirmed emails and social media accounts.
- **Watch and Listen Closely** - Fake audio or video might include choppy sentences, unnatural or out-of-place inflection, odd phrasing, or background sounds that don’t match the speaker’s location. These are all red flags and signs of a fake.
- **Be Careful What You Post Online** - Stay alert to the possibility of impersonation. Make sure your family knows about deepfakes, and tell everyone to use caution when posting things publicly.

If you have spotted a scam (whether or not you’ve lost money), report it to [BBB.org/ScamTracker](https://www.bbb.org/ScamTracker). These reports can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Consumers can also visit the Scam Tracker website to view the latest reported scams in their neighborhood or across North America.

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