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Chester County officials team up with senior centers to warn seniors about fraud

By **MEDIANEWS GROUP**

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Chester County Sheriff Fredda Maddox and Senior Law Center Victoria Long role play phone calls to teach community members about fraud prevention at the West Chester Senior Center.(SUBMITTED PHOTO)

WEST CHESTER — Wednesday, June 15, is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day — a time to focus on protecting seniors from abuse, fraud, violence, negligence and other harm that is far too common. To help prevent senior fraud, the Chester County Sheriff's Office is collaborating with the Senior Law Center of Chester County and local senior centers to present workshops entitled "Senior Fraud: Protect Yourself and Your Loved Ones."

Statistics about financial crimes against older adults are staggering. Approximately one in 10 elders in Pennsylvania and the United States has fallen victim to senior fraud (FinCEN). The average amount of an elder's financial loss was \$34,200, with the greatest losses coming from checking or savings accounts (Office of Financial Protection for Older Americans).

On June 8, participants at the West Chester Senior Center heard about different types of scams, who is affected, signs to look for and who to call if you suspect you are being targeted. The hour-long program will run again on June 14 at 10:30 a.m. at Brandywine Valley Active Aging Downingtown Senior Center and on June 21 at 10:30 a.m. online and at BVAA Coatesville Senior Center.

“Every year the Chester County Sheriff’s Office receives phone calls from members of the public who report fraudulent calls — phone calls they’ve received about providing money or gifts cards to help a relative who a caller claims has been incarcerated or to avoid incarceration for supposed failure to appear for jury duty, for example. Some people impersonate or pose as law enforcement officers or Good Samaritans to swindle unsuspecting victims,” said Chester County Sheriff Fredda Maddox.

“Law enforcement will never ask for funds or information including your social security number over the phone. Education is crucial to help protect yourself and people who are vulnerable to deception. Prevention is key,” added Maddox.

Victoria Long, Legal Advocate at the Senior Law Center Chester County, provided tips to help prevent fraud. “Don’t record your name on your voicemail greeting so that a scammer cannot save it on a computer system. Beware of false urgency; a scammer may try to create a sense of emergency. Get help if you suspect that someone is trying to deceive you. Report fraud that has happened. You’re not alone,” Long said.

For additional preventative action, sign up for free Fraud Guard with the Chester County Recorder of Deeds to receive an early warning email notification when a land document is recorded under a name you register. Register at www.chesco.org/recorder and click Fraud Prevention Initiatives on the left menu. The Recorder of Deeds and Register of Wills also partner on a prevention program that helps prevent illegal property transfer that could harm incapacitated persons including senior citizens.

The CCSO and Senior Law Center’s fraud prevention workshops are free and open to the public. The CCSO will host a free document-shredding event for individuals on July 30, at the West Chester Senior Center (limit of three boxes per car).