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### **South Kingstown Police Department warns of rental property scam**

*“If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is.”*

The South Kingstown Police Department today warned residents of an increase in rental property-related scams and urged both renters and property owners to be vigilant as they transact business.

“South Kingstown is a great place to live and visit and our rental properties are in high demand,” said Matthew C. Moynihan, Chief of Police. “If you are renting a property here or own a rental property, remember to be cautious, do your research, and handle your financial transactions carefully. If something seems too good to be true, it probably is.”

According to the FBI’s Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3), 42 victims in Rhode Island lost \$1,414,709 in real estate-related scams in 2021. The FBI Boston Division recently cited some examples of these scams in Rhode Island including:

- An Idaho man was in the process of re-locating to Rhode Island and responded to a Craigslist ad for a year-long rental in Narragansett, RI. After securing a \$21,756 advance from his employer, he wired that money to the “owner” and set up a time to gain access to the residence. Prior to the agreed upon meeting time, the man received a text canceling the meeting because the “owner” was in Chicago tending to his sick son. The man went to the residence and was greeted by the actual property owner who told him it was not a rental property and he had not posted an online ad.
- An East Providence, RI, man responded to an online advertisement for an apartment in Cambridge, MA, requiring the first and last month’s rent, along with a security deposit. The man was told he would not be given the keys and allowed to access the apartment until the \$6,000 check cleared the bank. As soon as that happened, he made an appointment to collect the keys for the apartment, but no one answered the door. After calling and texting the purported owner, the victim received a text stating “you got scammed, do not text this phone anymore.”
- A University of Rhode Island student responded to an online advertisement on Facebook Marketplace for an apartment in Wakefield, Rhode Island. The student wired \$1,800 to secure the place after he was told he wouldn’t be allowed to see the apartment prior to moving in because the landlord is always traveling. When he showed up to move in, the address he was given was for the leasing office and he was told there were no units available.

Follow these tips to avoid being scammed:

- Do not wire funds to people you do not know.
- Research public records to find out who owns the property you are seeking to rent or purchase and be sure you are in contact with them or their approved agent.
- Know local rental prices.
- Look for online reviews, references, and testimonials from past renters.
- Be wary if a potential tenant wants to rent property sight unseen – or if a landlord asks that you send a deposit without seeing a property.
- Be wary if a potential renter says they are out of town and will send you a cashiers' check or if a potential landlord says he is out of the country and wants the rent sent to a foreign account.
- Do not accept overpayment for rentals. If you receive a check for more than the specified amount, return it. Do not deposit it.

If you find yourself the target or victim of a rental scam, stop all contact immediately. If you have already sent money, report any transfer of funds to your financial institution immediately and file a complaint with your local police department.

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