

PUBLIC SAFETY ADVISORY

We have learned that there is a credible international scam that poses a potential threat to the safety and welfare of our international students. We are writing to make you aware of this ongoing scam, and we want you to make your families, friends and fellow students aware of it as well.

Local and federal authorities have advised us that multiple international students in the region have been affected by this scam — including two JHU students in Washington, D.C. These cases remain under investigation by the police and other law enforcement agencies.

How it works

This scam is complex, and you can better protect yourself and your family if you understand how it works. Those who commit these crimes try to take advantage of people who are not prepared and informed, so we are trying to help you, your family and fellow students be prepared.

The goal of this scam is to extort large sums of money from students and their families, and can, at times, involve a threat of physical harm.

In previous cases, someone contacts a student, pretending to be an official from an embassy or consulate of the student's home government. The individual claims that the student is involved in a crime at home, demands the student's cooperation in the alleged investigation, and tells the student to go into hiding and await instructions. In addition, the student is warned against contacting family, friends and law enforcement. If the student obeys this direction, it effectively ensures that the student will not contact his or her family at home, and the student's family, friends and fellow students will not be able to contact the student. The criminals then contact the student's family, claiming they have kidnapped the student, and demand a ransom.

If you receive a similar type of contact either in-person, via telephone or through social media, do not obey any instructions you are given, but instead call the number listed below and immediately get to a safe place.

This number is for the U.S. government's Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), specifically for the FBI's Virtual Kidnapping Scam Task Force: [1-800-225-5324](tel:1-800-225-5324)

If you're not comfortable calling the FBI, you can contact the Johns Hopkins [Office of International Services](#), your school's Student Affairs office, or [Johns Hopkins Security](#).

Actions you should take now to avoid becoming a target

Criminals learn about you through your publicly available information, such as information typically available from social media, like Facebook or WeChat. Therefore, you should secure your personal information online by using privacy settings that allow only your friends and family to see it. Criminals can use unsecured online information to make their messages to you or your family seem legitimate. Please warn family members at home that this scam is occurring at some campuses in the United States. Give them contact information for your friends, roommate or for other people they can contact if they are unable to reach you. Please also give your family members contact information for the Johns Hopkins [Office of International Services](#), your school's Student Affairs office, and the [Johns Hopkins Security](#) office serving your school. In an emergency, they can contact one of those offices or, of course, they can contact local law enforcement in Baltimore or Washington, D.C.

Contact Information

Office of International Services

667-208-7001

Student Affairs Office

410-516-8382

Johns Hopkins Security

Baltimore: 410-516-7777

Washington, DC: 202-663-5808

Here is how you can help

If you feel that you have any information relating to this type of scam, please report it immediately using the FBI phone number listed above. Stay in contact with your friends, fellow students and roommates and report any irregularities in their absences.

Although many of the reports of affected students involve international students, this scam is a threat to all members of the JHU community, and we hope that this message provides everyone with the information needed to protect themselves and their families against this form of crime.