Sonia learns the truth about Government Imposters

A Fotonovela from the Federal Trade Commission

Follow Sonia's story...

...from the moment she receives an alleged call from the government until she learns the truth.
The Federal Trade Commission is the nation’s consumer protection agency. Its mission is to protect consumers from fraudulent and deceptive practices.

This fotonovela is part of the FTC’s ongoing efforts to help the Latino community avoid scams and stop fraud. For more information, visit www.consumer.ftc.gov/fotonovela.

Report fraud by calling 1-877-FTC-HELP or at www.ftc.gov/complaint.
Hello?

Hi, is this Sonia Mendoza?

Yes.

*RING*

This is Ed González Jones from the U.S. National Grants Agency. Great news! You won money from the federal government and I have your check for $9,000.

I won $9,000? Wow that’s amazing!

All you have to do is send us a processing fee. Call me once you’ve done that and you’ll get your check in the mail.

I don’t believe it. The government is giving me money?

Believe it, because it’s TRUE.
Hurry up, we have to go!

Wait! I just got a call from the government. I won $9,000 dollars!

The guy said that to get my money all I have to do is pay a fee and then call him back.

What? The government doesn’t call offering money.

Oh! I’m so lucky... I won money just when I need it! Now I can pay for a trip to visit mom.
THE NEXT DAY: AFTER WIRING THE MONEY, SONIA CALLS THE NUMBER ED GAVE HER.

I wouldn’t send any money; he could be pretending to be from the government. It’s easy to be fooled.

I’m going to send it anyway. This could be my chance.

National Grants Agency.

Hi. I’m calling to claim my money.

Great, I see your information here. You’re getting $9,000. Isn’t that amazing? I need your driver’s license number. Did you already wire the processing fee?

Yes. And my driver license is...
SONIA WAITS FOR A CHECK THAT NEVER ARRIVES.

WHAT ARRIVES IS ANOTHER CALL...

Sonia, this is Ed from National Grants. You need to send us more money. We can’t send your check until you pay...

I already sent a fee. I can’t pay more!
LATER THAT DAY...

They keep calling and texting me from National Grants.

I have to send more money to get my $9,000.

See, now they’re harassing and threatening me!

Calm down. Don’t answer anything. Let’s think about this.

But I already wired them money!
Let’s see if this agency is even real. You look in the phone book and I’ll look online on my cell phone.

I can’t find anything about this agency that called you. No name, no address, no phone number.

Me either.

This sounds like a scam.
So let’s look at the facts.

The person who called you said you won money from the government, but the government doesn’t call you to give you money.

If someone you don’t know asked you to wire money, that’s like sending cash. You can’t trace it and you can’t get it back.

He said you had to pay to get the money you won, but if you have to pay, it’s not a prize.
Ok, I think I just learned a lesson.

You know what? We should report this to the Federal Trade Commission.

Someone told me you don’t have to give your name – just the details about what happened. Maybe we can help somebody else from losing some money.
Imposters use another person’s name and phone number to look like they are calling from the government. They try to trick you into sending them money. This is how you know a call, email, or text message is from an imposter:

**The caller says they work for the government and you won money in a “grant”, lottery or contest.** But the government doesn’t call you on the phone or send you an email or text to give you money. Ever.

- You can confirm that this is a scam: Ask for their name and then, hang up. Look up the number for that agency on the Internet or in the phone book. Call the agency, and speak to the person whose name the scammer used.

**The caller asks you to pay to get what you “won.”** If anyone tells you to wire money or use a pre-paid card to send them money, it’s a scam. If you have to pay, it’s not a prize.

- If you wire money to a stranger or use a pre-paid card to send money to someone you don’t know, it is like sending cash. You can’t trace it and you can’t get it back. It is gone, like the wind.

If you get a phone call, text message or email from the government, hang up the phone or delete the message. Then, report it to the FTC at www.ftc.gov/complaint or at 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357). You can report your experience in Spanish and give as much or as little information as you want. Your complaint helps law enforcement investigate people who do bad things.
Esta fotonovela es parte de nuestro continuo esfuerzo para elevar el nivel de concientización sobre las estafas dirigidas contra la comunidad latina. Este cuento provee consejos para evitar un problema al comprar un carro.

Para solicitar copias gratuitas en español, visite www.ftc.gov/fotonovela.

See all of the FTC’s fotonovelas at www.consumer.ftc.gov/fotonovela.

Sign up to get scam alerts and other news at www.ftc.gov/stay-connected.

August 2014