



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Valentine's Day Reminder: Illinois Seniors Urged to Watch for
"Sweetheart" Scams**

Springfield, IL - January 19, 2026

With Valentine's Day approaching and seniors making up nearly one-sixth of Illinois's population, officials are reminding residents, especially older adults and their loved ones to be alert for "Sweetheart" scams, a growing form of fraud that targets individuals seeking companionship and connection.

Sweetheart scams, also known as romance scams, often intensify around holidays such as Valentine's Day, when scammers exploit emotions, trust, and loneliness for financial gain.

What Are Sweetheart Scams?

Sweetheart scams occur when criminals create fake online personas to form romantic relationships with victims. These scams often begin on:

- Dating websites and apps
- Social media platforms
- Messaging apps, email, or text messages

Over time, the scammer builds trust and emotional attachment, then fabricates an urgent reason to request money—often claiming a medical emergency, travel issue, business problem, or investment opportunity. Once money is sent, it is rarely recoverable.

Warning Signs to Watch For

Seniors and their families should be cautious if a new romantic interest:

- Refuses to meet in person or consistently avoids video calls
- Claims to live or work overseas
- Quickly expresses strong emotions or commitment
- Asks for money, gift cards, cryptocurrency, or wire transfers
- Requests secrecy or discourages discussion with family or friends

Scammers often pressure victims to act quickly and privately, two major red flags.

How Seniors Can Protect Themselves

- Take your time. Be cautious of anyone who rushes a relationship.
- Never send money or financial information to someone you have not met in person. Talk it out. Share new online relationships with a trusted friend, family member, or advisor.
- Trust your instincts. If something feels off, it probably is.

How Loved Ones Can Help Prevent Victimization

Family members, caregivers, and friends play a critical role in prevention by:

- Checking in regularly and having open conversations about online relationships
- Watching for sudden financial changes or secrecy
- Encouraging skepticism, not shame around requests for money
- Offering help verifying identities or suspicious messages

Early, judgment-free conversations can stop a scam before financial or emotional harm occurs.

Checking in on Our Seniors Matters

Beyond financial loss, sweetheart scams can leave victims feeling embarrassed, isolated, and emotionally distressed. With many seniors living alone or experiencing reduced social contact, simple acts, such as a phone call, visit, or conversation can make a meaningful difference.

As Valentine's Day approaches, residents are encouraged to check in on elderly neighbors, friends, and family members, ensuring they feel supported, informed, and connected.

Anyone who believes they or a loved one may be the target of a scam should report it to local law enforcement and the Federal Trade Commission at reportfraud.ftc.gov.

Protecting our seniors protects our communities. Awareness, communication, and compassion remain the best defenses against fraud.