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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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December 11, 2013

District Attorney Warns of IRS Phone Scam

Your phone rings. You answer and are told you owe \$7,000 in back taxes to the Internal Revenue Service. The caller has your name and the last four of your Social Security number. You are told you better pay up now, or you will go to jail. The caller makes the call sound legitimate, but is it? Merced County District Attorney Larry D. Morse, II, says "No."

Morse says his office has recently been fielding a number of calls from all over Merced County regarding this phone scam. Morse said that the scammers are particularly targeting members of Merced County's immigrant communities. "These scammers can add the fear of deportation to the litany of other threats of legal action, including driver's or business license suspension, they claim will happen if the person doesn't pay up right now. These threats, especially of deportation, can be very effective against new immigrants who may not understand how the system works in their new country," Morse said.

Typical characteristics of this scam include:

- Scammers use fake names and IRS badge numbers. They generally use common names and surnames to identify themselves.
- Scammers may be able to recite the last four digits of a victim's Social Security Number.
- Scammers spoof the IRS toll-free number on caller ID to make it appear that it's the IRS calling.
- Scammers sometimes send bogus IRS emails to some victims to support their bogus calls.
- Victims hear background noise of other calls being conducted to mimic a call site.
- After threatening victims with jail time or driver's license revocation, scammers hang up and others soon call back pretending to be from the local police or DMV, and the caller ID supports their claim.

Potential victims of these scams are told the money they owe to the IRS must be paid promptly through a pre-loaded debit card or bank wire transfer of the funds. If the potential victim refuses to cooperate the scammer will often become hostile and insulting. "That's when the threats of arrest, deportation, or other dire consequences begin," Morse said.

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"It is important to understand that if the IRS needs to contact you regarding a tax issue, it will do so by U.S. mail, not by telephone," Morse said. Morse advised anyone receiving a phone call or communication from someone claiming to be from the IRS, should do the following:

- If you know you owe taxes or you think you might owe taxes, call the IRS at 1.800.829.1040. The IRS employees at that line can help you with questions or any payment issue if there really is such an issue.
- If you know you don't owe taxes or have no reason to think that you owe any taxes (for example, you've never received a bill or the caller made some bogus threats as described above), then call and report the incident to the <u>Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration</u> at 1.800.366.4484.
- If you've been targeted by this scam, you should also contact the Federal Trade Commission and use their "FTC Complaint Assistant" at FTC.gov. Please add "IRS Telephone Scam" to the comments of your complaint.