

Testimony From Rita and Stephen Shiman
Senate Special Committee on Aging
March 7, 2018

Good morning. Thank you for your interest in the problem of scamming of senior citizens. We also want to thank our friend, Sheriff Bill King of York County, Maine, for his work in educating seniors about scamming.

Indeed, there is a special bond between grandparents and their grandchildren. The scammers knew this well and took full advantage of it with us. They knew that when a grandchild is in trouble, grandparents go all out to help. There also was a concern on our part of potential racial bias in this situation.

On the morning of May 28, 2015 Rita answered the phone and spoke to someone who said he was our grandson, Kabo, who is an adopted native of Botswana. She said it sounded just like him. He said he was in Atlanta, Georgia and that he had been arrested and was in a county jail. He needed bail money. She asked him what brought him to Georgia from his home in Maryland. He said a college classmate had died of cancer and several friends drove to Georgia for the funeral.

Kabo told Rita he was assigned a public defender who promised him he would be freed upon payment of bond satisfactory to a judge. He was turning to us, because he didn't want his parents (our son and his wife) to know. He made Rita promise she would not tell anyone about this. He said the public defender would call us shortly.

The supposed public defender, identified as George Diaz, did call us and said he was meeting with the judge shortly. There was a sense of urgency. If we paid \$1,230 the judge would release Kabo. He said the transaction had to be in cash and sent via Western Union to his contact in the Dominican Republic, and he gave us the details. That statement alone should have raised a red flag, but we were so caught up in the moment that we were simply acting on autopilot. He also said that if Western Union questioned this transaction, we should say nothing. He said they legally have no right to ask. As it turned out, no one raised an eyebrow.

When we returned home after making payment and calmed down, we began to have second thoughts, especially after we received another call from the public defender that he had met with the judge and the amount we had sent was not enough. Stephen called the public defenders office in Atlanta and learned there was no one by the name of George Diaz. Stephen then called our son's house. Kabo picked up the call. He never was in Georgia!

It's very easy to play Monday morning quarterback. There were so many red flags. We replayed the entire incident over and over, and couldn't believe we had been so duped. Hopefully, through the work of this committee and that of AARP we can find a way to prevent others from becoming victims of this malicious activity.