



Inspector General Insights

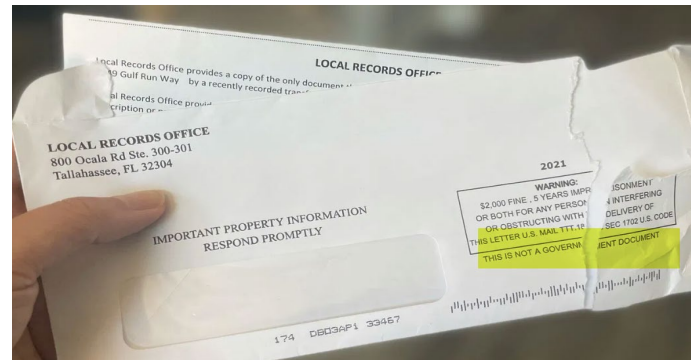
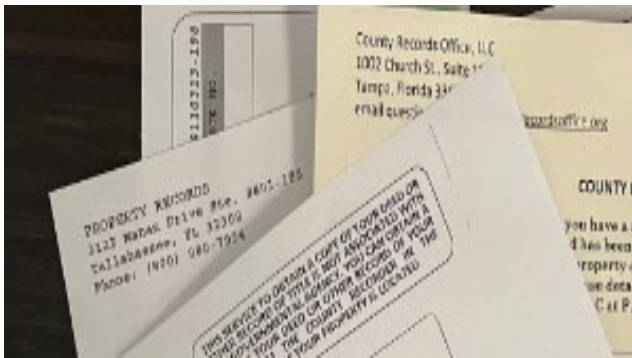
Background: In her February 2022 newsletter, the Clerk noted that many new homeowners in Collier County informed the Clerk's office that they have received a letter in the mail that appears to be from a government office; however, it is not. The deceitful letter is actually a solicitation sent from a private company attempting to convince unsuspecting homeowners to pay \$89.00 for a copy of their deed.



**Don't be Fooled by
Deceitful Mail that
Looks Official**

In December 2022, Clerks throughout Florida were surveyed about interactions with County Records Office, LLC out of Tampa. Clerks noted that this company was using deceptive practices to appear to be affiliated with the government, such as spelling the St. Johns County as St. John in a letter to homeowners.

Another Clerk noted similar practices from a company identified as "Property Records" and another from "Local Records Office" out of Tallahassee.



Objective: The Office of Inspector General (OIG) reviewed the background of the company noted in the Clerk's association survey, to determine if the company was operating lawfully, and determine if any of the complaints had resulted in prosecution.

Scope / Methodology: The OIG researched the Florida corporate filings, our confidential database, and performed an internet search regarding County Records Office, LLC.

Observations: The OIG noted that *County Records Office, LLC* had been an active Florida Limited Liability Company (LLC) since October 4, 2016.

- The internet showed different news reports of homeowner complaints about this company in Citrus County, Pinellas County, Polk County, and Lee County (City of Cape Coral) since 2017. Typically, County Records Office LLC retrieves property transactions, and sends official-looking letters to new property owners informing them that they could receive an official copy of the recorded deed by sending in \$89.00. Mailers were found to include a large disclaimer on the front that reads: "This is a solicitation for the order of goods or services and not a bill. You are under no obligation to make payments on account of this offer unless you accept this offer." As such, it was deemed a legal business because the company places the disclaimer where anyone can see it.

- Better Business Bureau (BBB) website records revealed County Records Office, LLC received 20 customer complaints in the last 3 years, and the BBB closed 11 of these complaints in the last 12 months. BBB records rated the owner's response to these complaints as 100%. However, a total of 54 customer reviews rated the company as 1.28 out of a 5.0 scale.

Conclusion: The OIG review showed that County Records Office, LLC is a valid and active LLC. Due to the disclaimers noted on the mailers, it is the responsibility of the homeowner not to accept this service or solicitation.

Clerk Kinzel passed this information along to the Florida Court Clerks & Comptrollers association.

Recommendations & Actions: Homeowners should beware of these scams.

- Residents can view and print copies of deeds and other property records for free, on the Clerk's website at www.CollierClerk.com. Certified copies may be purchased for \$1.00 per page/\$2.00 per instrument.
- For more information about property deeds and other official records, call the Recording Division at (239) 252-7242.

Total # Transactions	Amounts Audited or Reviewed	Questioned Costs	Taxpayer Savings	# Observations / Recommendations
1	\$ 89.00	\$89.00	N/A	2