



## Inspector General Insights

**Background:** Collier County Clerk of Courts and Comptroller, Crystal K. Kinzel, warns residents and visitors about a new round of telephone scams that are emerging in Southwest Florida. Seven (7) similar complaints were reported in January, where scammers were calling and falsely claiming that residents failed to appear at a court hearing. The scammers were then requesting that residents pay between \$3,000.00 to \$3,500.00 through Cash App to avoid executing an arrest warrant.

**Objective:** To inform resident of fraud schemes active in the community.

**Scope:** In total, five (5) of the current complaints have been reported to either the Office of Inspector General or Collier County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) Financial Crimes Bureau as of May 25, 2023.

**Observations** In the current scam, the caller identifies themselves as a current Sheriff's Deputy indicating a warrant out for the victim's arrest. While previous complaints centered around a failure to appear for court, the newest case focuses on a failure to report for jury duty. The scammers are then requesting a payment to avoid executing the arrest warrant. Additionally, the scammers are threatening victims with more jail time if they break a false "gag order" and discuss the incident with anyone.

**Recommendations & Actions:** "If you receive any suspicious calls asking for immediate money transfer such as this fraud scheme, immediately hang up the phone and immediately report it to law enforcement," said Crystal K. Kinzel, Collier County Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller.

While residents must legally respond to a jury summons, the Clerk of Courts does not issue arrest warrants for a failure to appear. Collier residents are urged to never give personal or financial information over the phone to a stranger, especially if the caller acts aggressively. Calls asking for payments made by cash, gift card or in person are a red flag for a fraud scheme. Residents should be wary of caller ID, as this can be spoofed, making a phone call look like it is coming from a legitimate source.

**Conclusion:** Collier County Sheriff's Office offers assistance with suspicious encounters involving a request for money or personal information through its Call Before You "Pay" hotline – (239) 252-CALL (2255). The hotline is staffed Monday through Friday by a deputy in the Financial Crimes Bureau.

Total # Transactions	Fraud Amounts Attempted	Questioned Costs	Taxpayer Savings	# Fraud Complaints Confirmed
5	\$ 15,000.00	N/A	N/A	5