

Press Release

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Cuyahoga County Department of Consumer Affairs Warns Residents of New Round of Impostor Scams

CLEVELAND – The Cuyahoga County Department of Consumer Affairs is warning residents about a new round of impostor scams impersonating County Sheriff’s deputies or court officials.

Arrest and court scams were the most-complained about category of scams reported to the Cuyahoga County Department of Consumer Affairs in 2018.

Over the weekend, the Cuyahoga County Sheriff’s Department received multiple complaints about impostor calls in which scammers identified themselves as deputies. When a Sheriff’s Department employee dialed one number reported by a resident, the scammer answered by saying, “Cuyahoga County Sheriff.”

In these scams, callers posing as police or court officials tell potential victims they missed a court date and threaten them with immediate arrest or account seizure unless they pay a fine. Some scammers may initially tell people to go to the Justice Center to pay, but when victims call back as instructed, they ultimately are told to pay using retail gift cards or money wires—forms of payment that government agencies do not accept.

“Calls threatening you with arrest, lawsuits or account seizure are flat-out scams,” said Sheryl Harris, Director of the Cuyahoga County Department of Consumer Affairs. **“These scammers steal the names of real agencies solely to scare you into paying them.”**

Nine of the top 10 scams reported to Cuyahoga County Consumer Affairs in 2018 were impostor scams. They are:

- 1) **Arrest/Court Scams** (Scammers pose as law enforcement or court officials)
- 2) **IRS Scams** (Callers pose as IRS agents)
- 3) **Computer Tech Scam** (Callers pretend to be techs offering help with one’s computer)
- 4) **Sweepstakes/Lottery Scams**
- 5) **Grandparent Scams** (Callers pretend to be grandkids in trouble with the law)
- 6) **Robocalls** (Tie with grandparent scams)
- 7) **Social Security or Medicare Scams**
- 8) **Credit or Account Scams** (Callers pose as banks or offer to lower credit rates)
- 9) **Charity Scam Calls**
- 10) **Debt Collection Scams** (Tie with charity calls)

So far in 2019, Consumer Affairs has been receiving additional reports of impostor calls offering free braces or other medical equipment.

The Cuyahoga County Department of Consumer Affairs offers these tips for avoiding impostor

scams:

- Don't trust caller ID readings—scammers often spoof names and numbers.
- Let numbers you don't recognize go to voicemail. And don't call unknown callers back.
- Hang up on anyone who threatens you with arrest, legal action or seizure of your accounts.
- Hang up if someone claims to be a grandchild in trouble with the law.
- Remember, it's not "free" or a "prize" if you have to pay.
- If you're worried, call police, Scam Squad or family for help checking out the call.
- Hang up if a caller insists on staying on the phone while you go to the bank or to buy gift cards. That's a ploy to keep you from checking out the story.
- Hang up if anyone directs you to pay using store gift cards, money wires or mailed cash. They're scammer favorites because they're hard for police to trace.

Cuyahoga County residents who receive scam calls are encouraged to report them by visiting consumeraffairs.cuyahogacounty.us or by calling the Scam Squad line at 216-443-SCAM (7226).