

MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT



Office of Public Information

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BEWARE OF TEXT MESSAGE SCAMMERS POSING AS COURT OFFICIALS, STATE COURT ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE WARNS; SCAMMERS TEXT TARGETS, DEMAND PAYMENT OVER THE PHONE TO QUASH BOGUS ARREST WARRANTS

LANSING, MI, July 2, 2012 – A text message appears on your phone, claiming to be from a local court and telling you that a warrant has been issued for your arrest. But the so-called “court” offers you a way out: you can quash the warrant by calling the number provided and paying \$500 by credit card.

Sounds official – but don’t be fooled, warns the State Court Administrative Office, the administrative agency of the Michigan Supreme Court. The text message is only a scam that works by intimidating its victims.

State Court Administrator Chad C. Schmucker said variations of the scam have been reported in other states. He cautioned Michigan residents to be on guard. “Here’s how it works: the victim receives a text message, stating that he or she is on a ‘failure to appear’ list and has an outstanding warrant,” Schmucker explained. “The text then instructs the victim to call a phone number to pay up to avoid being arrested. To make the demand seem plausible, the scammer often uses the name of an actual local court or court official.”

But Michigan courts don’t use text messaging to advise someone that he or she is subject to arrest, Schmucker said. “It’s a fraud, an attempt to deceive the victim,” he said. “Don’t call the number in the text message, but report the text to the police and to the court the text message sender claims to represent. In addition to the fraud, it’s a crime for anyone to falsely pose as a court official.”

A similar phone scam involves threatening victims with arrest unless they give up personal information, such as birth dates, credit card numbers, and Social Security numbers. Typically, the caller poses as a court official and tells the intended victim that he or she will be arrested for missing jury duty. “Prospective jurors can call courts, but courts don’t initiate these calls; they communicate with prospective jurors by mail,” Schmucker said. “And courts do not call prospective jurors to get their financial information.”

To avoid becoming a victim of these scams, remember the following:

- Be suspicious if a person calls, e-mails, or texts you claiming to be a court official.
- Be skeptical if you are told, “In order to avoid arrest (or prosecution), you must provide us with your Social Security number so we can verify who you are.”
- Be suspicious if the caller, e-mail sender, or text message sender pressures you for immediate payment or other action, or refuses to send you written information to review.
- Never give out your bank, credit card, or Social Security information over the phone to someone who calls you, or in response to an e-mail or text message.
- Report suspicious calls, e-mails, and text messages to local police.