

Scam Alert: The "Federal Jury Summons" Threat

A recent incident involving a local resident serves as a chilling reminder of how sophisticated—and aggressive—phone scams have become. What began as a quiet drive between two friends quickly escalated into a high-pressure psychological ordeal designed to extort thousands of dollars.

The Setup: Exploiting Civic Duty

The call originated from an unknown number. The caller identified himself as a **U.S. Marshal** and claimed the resident had ignored a federal jury summons in Tampa. To make the claim more believable, the "officer" provided a badge number and the name of a real federal judge.

Crucially, the victim had actually just completed jury duty in Sarasota. The scammers exploited this recent, stressful experience to create a sense of panic.

The Psychological Trap

The scammers used a "tag-team" approach, with a second, more aggressive "superior" joining the call. They utilized several high-pressure tactics to keep the victim off-balance:

- **Complete Personal Profiles:** They possessed the victim's full legal name (including middle and maiden names) and her exact home address, making the threat feel legitimate.
- **Isolation:** They forbade her from speaking to anyone else or muting the call, threatening that any interference—even from the friend in the car—would lead to an immediate arrest.
- **Emotional Manipulation:** They texted "official" documents, including a fake arrest warrant and a "gag order." They forced her to read the arrest documents aloud, a tactic designed to maximize her distress and perhaps record her voice for future fraud.

The Financial Demand

The "officer" claimed a judge had set a fine of **\$45,000 for each incident**, demanding a 10% cash payment of **\$9,000** that very day to avoid incarceration. Initially, they instructed her to go to a courthouse to "verify her signature" but quickly pivoted, directing her toward a bank and a third-party payment location.

The "Tells" of a Scam

Despite the elaborate setup, there were several red flags that became clear once the victim was away from the pressure of the call:

- **Unprofessional Conduct:** One of the "officers" used profanity (an "F-bomb") when the friend tried to intervene.
- **Inaccurate Details:** The Sarasota address they provided for the "courthouse" was actually a building used for Teen Court.
- **Third-Party Payments:** Law enforcement will **never** ask for payment via third-party locations, gift cards, or wire transfers.
- **Isolation Tactics:** Real authorities will not demand that you remain on the phone or prevent you from consulting a lawyer or family member.

What to Do if You Receive This Call

If you receive a call from someone claiming to be law enforcement or a court official:

1. **Hang Up Immediately:** Do not engage. If the call is legitimate, you can verify it through official channels.
2. **Verify Independently:** Call the Clerk of the Court or the local Sheriff's Office using a verified number from their official website—not a number provided by the caller.
3. **Protect Your Info:** Never confirm banking details or personal identifiers over the phone to an unsolicited caller.
4. **Report It:** Notify the local police and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC).