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CONSUMER ALERT

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AG Kilmartin Warns Rhode Islanders of Aggressive Jury Duty and Arrest Warrant Scam

Attorney General Peter F. Kilmartin is warning Rhode Islanders of an aggressive new scam hitting the area, where people are being threatened with imminent arrest for failure to appear for jury duty, however they are offered the opportunity to “post bail” by paying a certain amount with a credit card.

The scam artist claims to be from a local county sheriff’s office, has personal information about the individual, such as name and address, and appears to be calling from a phone number with a local area code.

Those who have been contacted tell the Office of Attorney General that the caller gets aggressive and threatening when questioned about the claims, often indicating they will be arriving at the home shortly to make the arrest.

Residents should be aware of several red flags associated with this scam:

- The Jury Commissioner’s Office for the Rhode Island Superior Court does not issue arrest warrants for individuals who fail to appear for jury duty. If someone fails to appear for jury duty, the Courts will contact the individual to inquire why they failed to appear and will reschedule or excuse the individual based on the circumstances.
- If an arrest warrant is issued for an individual, law enforcement will not contact the person to let them know it exists. No law enforcement agency in Rhode Island will allow an individual to post bail by credit card over the telephone to avoid being arrested.

- Sheriffs in Rhode Island are a division of the Rhode Island Department of Public Safety and primarily work with the Courts. Unlike most other states, Rhode Island does not have sheriff departments based in counties. Each city and town has its own local police department.

Attorney General Kilmartin is urging anyone who receives a similar phone call or threat to contact their local police to report the incident. “While it is more likely than not this scam is being operated outside Rhode Island, the quickest way to stop it from spreading is to be aware of their tactics and inform law enforcement. If you are contacted by this outfit, get the name and the phone number of the person calling, make note of who they allegedly work for, and then hang up and contact your local police,” said Attorney General Kilmartin.

“Scam artists often use information that is readily available on the Internet, like your name, address and phone number, to give the perception they are legitimate and to heighten the fear of their victims that an arrest is imminent. It is despicable and it is illegal.”

Attorney General Kilmartin has notified the Rhode Island Judiciary and the Rhode Island Sheriffs, a division of the Rhode Island Department of Public Safety of the scam. There is a “Bristol County Sheriff’s Office” in Massachusetts, however, that office has been contacted and calls of this nature do not come from that office.

About the Office of the Attorney General Consumer Protection Unit

The Office of the Attorney General Consumer Protection Unit investigates and mediates consumer complaints concerning unfair and unlawful business practices and misleading advertising arising out of alleged violations of the Deceptive Trade Practices Act. If groups of people are victimized by a deceptive trade practice, this office may file in the Superior Court a civil investigative demand, which is a formal investigation. In appropriate cases, a lawsuit to stop the illegal business practice may be initiated.

Apart from carrying out its statutory responsibilities, the Unit also provides information and referral services to the general public. Consumers are directed to the appropriate governmental or private agencies for help in answering specialized questions or resolving disputes that are not within the Unit's jurisdiction.

The Consumer Protection Unit is available to speak to community groups on how to prevent being a victim of identity theft and other scams.

For more information on the Consumer Protection Unit, or to file a consumer complaint, please call 401-274-4400 or visit www.riag.ri.gov.

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