

Citizen detectives blow the whistle on jury duty phone scam

Rebekah L. Sanders Arizona Republic

Published 6:30 a.m. MT Apr. 10, 2021

[View Comments](#)



A pair of citizen detectives from different states blew the whistle on a phone scammer they caught using Maricopa County court and law enforcement officials' names to dupe people into paying fake jury duty fines, county officials say.

Although judges can fine Arizonans up to \$500 and require them to show up for jury duty upon threat of arrest if they skip twice or more without being excused, [it's rare for the punishment to be that severe](#), and no one is notified by a phone call, Maricopa County court officials said.

Instead, the court typically mails a "failure to appear" notice before taking action. The person is required to attend a court hearing, where a judge determines the fine, if any, and schedules future jury service, according to court officials.



Peter Lebeau, of Gilbert, blew the whistle on a man using government officials' names to scam people out of money. Courtesy Of Peter Lebeau

Constable's name a part of the ruse

In the first scam incident, a financial consultant in Alabama received a call from someone claiming to be "Ken Allen from Maricopa County," according to court officials. Allen is an east Mesa constable.

The caller left a voicemail threatening the financial consultant with arrest for failing to appear for jury duty if he didn't pay a \$4,000 fine with a prepaid debit card. The caller offered to meet at a grocery store to take care of the payment.

The Alabama man found online that Allen was a constable with the Maricopa County Justice Courts and reported the scam. Allen had not made the call. His name was simply part of the ruse.

Call on Saturday a tipoff

In the second incident, Peter Lebeau, a 65-year-old IT professional from Gilbert, was driving when he received a call from a man with a deep, authoritative voice who introduced himself as Maricopa County sheriff's Deputy Scott Davis.

The caller "was very official sounding, using all kinds of court terminology," Lebeau said.

The man said he had a warrant for Lebeau's arrest for missing jury duty, Lebeau recalled, and he wanted to know Lebeau's excuse.

Lebeau asked to call back after he found somewhere to park.

When Lebeau returned the call, he heard a strange-sounding message and left a voicemail.

"You have reached Maricopa County Court Investigations. If this is an emergency, please hang up and dial 911," the computer-generated voice recording said. "All of our investigators are busy assisting other citizens at this time. Please leave your name and a detailed message at the sound of the tone and one of our investigators will return your call as quickly as possible."

He also realized it was Saturday, a day most government officials would not be working.

His antennae went up.

When Lebeau Googled Davis, he found a phone number.

Davis is not a sheriff's deputy, but instead the justice courts' public information officer, whose phone is always on in case a reporter calls about breaking news.

Lebeau dialed Davis and explained the situation.

They decided to turn the tables on the scammer.

Turning the tables

When the scammer called back, they were both on the line and recording.

After some back and forth, Lebeau asked the scammer to provide the case docket number. The man on the other end of the phone gave a string of letters and numbers.

"I don't know what you're trying, to determine whether I'm real or not real," the man said.

Lebeau asked the scammer to provide the judge's name. "Janet Barton," the man replied.

Davis, the court spokesman, couldn't resist. He jumped in to note that Barton had retired from the bench in 2019.

In a matter of seconds, the scammer hung up.

'Separating the public from their money'

The scammer's caller ID, likely routed through channels to mask the real source, was 602-800-8166, according to Davis. When The Arizona Republic recently dialed it, a person who wouldn't answer calls but responded by text said he had nothing to do with jury duty or the courts.

Court officials say anyone who receives a call threatening arrest for failure to appear for jury duty in Maricopa County should write down the incoming phone number and file a nonemergency police report.

Lebeau wants people to be aware of the scam so they don't fall for it.

"These people (scammers) are getting better and better and better at separating the public from their money," he said. "We as a general public really need to get the word out that these kind of calls aren't made by the government. They don't use the telephone as a methodology of informing you of infractions."

If you get a call about an arrest warrant for missing jury duty:

- Write down the phone number the person is calling from and hang up.
- Do not give the caller any personal information.
- Do not agree to provide any money.
- Contact your police department's nonemergency line to file a complaint.
- To verify your jury service status, call the Maricopa County Jury Office at 602-506-5879.

How to protect yourself from phone scams

- Don't rely on caller ID to determine if a caller is on the level. Scammers can use "spoofing" techniques to make it look like they are calling from a local or official number.
- Never give out personal information over the phone — such as your Social Security number, birth date, address, bank account or passwords — unless you initiated the call to a verified number.

- Beware of aggressive tactics. Scammers will pressure you to provide payment or personal information quickly and may promise a financial reward or threaten fines, lawsuits or punishment.
- Government officials are unlikely to call you and are more likely to send you a letter instead.
- If someone claims to be from the government, you can take down their name, hang up, call the government agency directly using the number you find for the agency online or in the phone book and ask if the call was legitimate. Don't use a phone number the caller gives you.
- If you need help figuring out if something is a scam, call the AARP Fraud Watch Network Helpline 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. ET Monday through Friday at 877-908-3360.

Report scams to:

- Federal Communications Commission: <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov/hc/en-us>
- Federal Trade Commission: <https://reportfraud.ftc.gov>
- Arizona Attorney General's Office: <https://www.azag.gov/complaints/consumer>

Got a problem? Azcentral.com can help

Have you been ripped off? Do you have a complaint against a business, health care company or government agency? If you live in Arizona, Call for Action volunteers and Arizona Republic reporters may be able to investigate. We're #HeretoHelpAZ.

Fill out a form at <http://heretohelpaz.azcentral.com>.

Consumer reporter Rebekah L. Sanders investigates issues of fraud and abuse involving businesses, health care and government agencies. Contact her at rsanders@azcentral.com or follow her on Twitter [@RebekahLSanders](https://twitter.com/RebekahLSanders).