

Sheriff Armando Fontoura today issued an alert to Essex County residents to be wary of pote

Newark – Sheriff Armando Fontoura today issued an alert to Essex County residents to be wary of potential identity thieves who pose as jury managers.

“Scam artists are extremely creative and inventive,” warned Sheriff Fontoura. “Our department is currently investigating two recent cases wherein individuals, posing as representatives of the New Jersey court system, came to the homes of local residents and sought to obtain information, such as Social Security numbers, birthdates and driver's license information.”

The suspect in the Essex County jury duty scams is described as a black male in his late 20's to late 30's, approximately 5' 10", 180 pounds, clean shaven and well spoken. When last seen the suspect was wearing a blue tee shirt, jeans and a baseball cap.

Acting Administrative Director of the New Jersey Superior Court Judge Glenn A. Grant pointed out that “the judiciary does not and never has asked for personal identifiers over the phone, by e-mail or in person.”

According to Sheriff Fontoura, another version of the “Jury Duty Scam" is employed over the telephone.

Fontoura said, “The scam works like this: the caller tells his potential victim that he or she failed to report for jury duty and a warrant has been issued for their arrest. The victim says he or she never received the notice for jury duty. To clear the matter up, the caller says he will need information for verification purposes. Sometimes the scammers are so bold as to ask for credit card numbers to pay off the modest fine allegedly imposed by the court. It's all a fraud and this is the time to hang up the phone.”

The sheriff stated that jury duty scams have been around for years. And, while more prevalent in Florida, New York and California, New Jersey jurisdictions, such as the Essex and Somerset County Sheriff's Offices and police departments in North Plainfield, Atlantic Highlands, Madison and Hillsborough have deemed it necessary in the past to issue warnings.

“The bold simplicity of either version of the scam may be what makes them so effective,” Sheriff Fontoura noted. “Facing the unexpected threat of arrest, victims are caught off guard. They're scared and may be quick to part with personal identity information to defuse the situation.”

Ultimately, the real trick in a successful jury duty scam is to put people on the defensive and then reel them back in with the promise of a clean slate.

The only official jury duty notification is a jury summons that includes a self-addressed return address to the Superior Court for the county in which it was sent. The official jury duty summons does ask for a birth date and a driver's license number but Social Security numbers are optional.

“Once again, we remind our residents that jury duty personnel do not come to your home in person nor do they call you on the telephone or contact you via e-mail,” advised Sheriff Fontoura.

For complete information about jury duty in New Jersey access www.judiciary.state.nj.us/juror.htm on the Superior Court's website.