

BBB Consumer Alert: Beware of Traffic Citation Scams!

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Receiving a notice about an unpaid traffic ticket can be alarming. Unfortunately, scammers know this and are increasingly using fake traffic citation notices to pressure consumers into paying fines that don't actually exist. The Better Business Bureau is warning consumers to be cautious if they receive unexpected messages claiming they owe money for a traffic violation.

Traffic citation scams typically arrive by **text message, email, or automated phone call**. The message often claims that you have an unpaid ticket, toll violation, or citation and warns that immediate action is required to avoid serious consequences. These consequences may include **additional fines, license suspension, vehicle registration holds, or even arrest warrants**.

The message usually includes a link directing you to a payment website or a phone number to call to resolve the issue. However, these links often lead to **fraudulent websites designed to collect your credit card information or personal details**, such as your driver's license number.

How the Scam Works:

Scammers rely on urgency and fear to convince victims to act quickly without verifying the claim. A typical scam follows these steps:

First, the consumer receives an unexpected message stating that they have an unpaid traffic ticket or toll violation. The message may appear to come from a local police department, court system, or department of motor vehicles. In some cases, scammers use technology to **spoof official phone numbers or agency names**, making the message appear legitimate.

Next, the message warns that failure to pay immediately will result in penalties such as late fees, license suspension, or legal action. This pressure is intended to make recipients panic and pay quickly.

Finally, the message includes a link to a website where the consumer is instructed to pay the fine. These sites may look convincing and include official-looking logos or government language. Once a victim enters payment information, scammers can steal funds and potentially use the personal information for identity theft.

Red Flags to Watch For:

- There are several warning signs that a traffic citation notice may be a scam:
- You receive a **text message demanding immediate payment** for a traffic violation.
- The notice contains a **link to an unfamiliar payment website**.
- The message uses **threatening language** about license suspension or arrest if payment isn't made immediately.
- The sender requests payment through **gift cards, wire transfers, cryptocurrency, or payment apps**.
- The notice does not include **official court documentation or instructions for verifying the citation**.

Government agencies rarely send traffic ticket notices through text messages with payment links.

How to Protect Yourself:

If you receive a message claiming you owe money for a traffic citation, take a moment to verify the information before responding. Avoid clicking links in unexpected messages or emails. Instead, navigate to the agency's website manually through your browser.

Contact the court or agency directly using the official phone number listed on its website. Many courts and law enforcement agencies provide online systems that allow you to **look up citations using your name, driver's license number, or ticket number**.

Consumers should also remember that legitimate government agencies typically allow payment through **secure online portals, mail, or in person**, not through unusual payment methods like gift cards or cryptocurrency.

What to Do if You Paid a Scammer:

If you believe you have fallen victim to a traffic citation scam, act quickly. Contact your bank or credit card company to report the fraudulent charge and request that the transaction be stopped if possible. Monitor your financial accounts closely for suspicious activity.

You should also report the scam to **BBB Scam Tracker**, which helps warn others and allows law enforcement agencies to identify emerging fraud trends.

Stay Informed:

Scammers constantly adapt their tactics, often impersonating trusted organizations to make their messages appear convincing. Staying informed and verifying unexpected requests for payment can help you avoid becoming a victim.

If you receive a suspicious traffic citation notice, take the time to confirm it before taking action. A few minutes of verification can help protect your finances and personal information.

Kelvin Collins is president & CEO of the Better Business Bureau serving the Fall Line Corridor, serving 77 counties in East Alabama, West Georgia, Southwest Georgia, Central Georgia, East Georgia, and Western South Carolina. This tips column is provided through the local BBB and the International Association of Better Business Bureaus (IABBB). The Better Business Bureau sets standards for ethical business behavior, monitors compliance and helps consumers identify trustworthy businesses. Questions or complaints about a specific company or charity should be referred directly to the BBB at Phone: 1-800-763- 4222, Web site: BBB.org or E-mail: info@centralgeorgia.bbb.org.