

Written testimony HB5121 from Timmons Roberts
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In favor of HB 5121

Dear Chairs and Representatives:

On April 16th, 2024 I was scammed. Pretty badly. I'm here telling you about it because I wish someone had told me, and the CoinStar machines in supermarkets made it possible.

The worst thing is not the money I lost--that can be lived with. There are three things that are worse.

First, I can't get this guy out of my head, who was on the phone imitating a federal marshall. He was brilliant, had it down.

Second, my trust in humanity is badly shaken. I have had a very lucky existence (privileged, I know), but I have actively sought to not be a distrusting person, because I just don't want to live in the world where I can't trust people. In my experience, trusting people (and being a bit wary) often leads to much better outcomes than a climate of distrust. This sucks.

Third, and worst, is this is humiliating. Everyone thinks they are smart enough to not let this happen to them; that it's only old clueless women or something who get scammed. Talking to the FBI was helpful in convincing me otherwise, and apparently there's some research on the fact that highly educated people with good jobs are just as likely to fall victim as anyone. My theory is that those high SES people are just ashamed to admit it, so we don't hear about their being scammed much. Still, the point is I keep running through my head why I fell for it and why I didn't figure it out sooner. It's humiliating.

Here's the report I made to the Providence police, and read to the FBI agent. Learn from me if you can. These guys are really good.

"I received a call from a Washington DC number (202-760-6249) while driving that I had failed to appear to federal jury duty in Providence, and that I was therefore in contempt of court for failure to appear. I said I never got a summons, and a "Lt. Stephen Harris" said he was checking and indeed the signature did not seem to match my drivers license and other documents, so it was likely forged, possibly by a postal service member. He said there were 39 people who didn't show up and they were trying to contact from that day. He gave me a number to call back (401-900-5717 x101#) with an extension--the answering machine said it was the federal court in Providence RI, sounded completely legit. He picked up the extension. He said I was in contempt, and my options were to appear at the federal courthouse and would be detained until processing was over, which could take 8-10 hours, or pay a fee ahead of appearing and could be

processed more quickly. [It turns out you can get a few days in jail for skipping jury duty. I don't know if/when that happens; doesn't matter.]

"I was told I could pay this fee at a "Federal Payment Kiosk", which the government had been using since COVID when federal buildings were closed. I was told CoinStar machines could do that, and that I could pay cash into the machine and transfer the payment, which would then have the blockchain verifying payment, and after my signature forgery was cleared, I would be reimbursed fully. [Looking back, of course this seems absurd.]

I was passing through Sturbridge Mass so stopped at the Stop-n-Shop, where there was a Citizens Bank branch where I withdrew cash and proceeded to the CoinStar and sent the funds. I went back to the teller to get more to make the amount they said I had to pay, and he said this was fraud and took my phone and hung it up and instructed me not to answer it. I then called the Federal Court number on google maps and in the jury duty section the woman said several people had been scammed this week."

The FBI guy said this scam is moving across the country, and a google search confirms that, with slight variations. I have switched my phone to not ring for any unknown numbers--they can leave a message but I may not even call many of them back. I'm trying to shut out texts from unknown numbers. Etc.

Thank you for moving on this issue. HB 5121 seems like a good start, but I'd encourage you to go even further.

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