

SCAM ALERT



Office of the Inspector General
SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Think Before You Scan — Beware of QR Code Phishing

It starts as a scary phone call about a loved one, a debt, or a legal problem — followed by a text with a barcode or QR code with instructions to load them up with money at a big-name retailer. This is a fast-growing twist on old-fashioned gift card scams, and everyone is a target.

How the Scam Works

You get a call or text message from someone claiming to be a police officer, sheriff's deputy, or federal agent. They say you owe a fine or debt or tell you a family member — often an adult child — has been arrested and needs bail money. You might even hear your family member's voice, but keep in mind that voice cloning technology is easy, inexpensive, and readily available.



Instead of asking for cash or a wire transfer, they text or email you one or more barcodes or QR codes and tell you to visit a retail store, load money onto each one, and read back the code once it's paid. Some victims lose thousands of dollars, often without ever giving up a Social Security number or other personal information — the barcode itself is the scam.

Law enforcement officers will **NEVER** demand immediate payment by sending barcodes or QR codes. Neither will the Social Security Administration (SSA), its Office of the Inspector General (OIG), or other government agencies.

- If someone tells you to load money onto a barcode or QR code at a retail store, hang up or ignore the message. It's a scam!
- Pause. Scammers create urgency so you won't have time to think or talk to others.
- Never trust a call transfer. Hang up and call the agency directly using a phone number from its official website.

Report It

If you've received a barcode or QR code scam attempt involving someone claiming to be from SSA, report it at ssa.gov/scam or call the SSA OIG Fraud Hotline at **1-800-269-0271**. You can also report it to the FTC at reportfraud.ftc.gov.



Members of the press may make inquiries to Social Security OIG at oig.press@ssa.gov

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