



NEWS FROM SCDCA

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

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A New Social Media Twist on Government Grant Scams

COLUMBIA, S.C. – Government grant scams have been around for a while, but scammers are adding a new twist to this old scam – Facebook. The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs (SCDCA) is urging consumers to educate themselves on this alarming trend.

In 2016, **five percent** of the 1,644 scams reported to SCDCA were government grant scams. Of that number, 18% were initiated through Facebook. Fraudsters using this method netted **\$25,750** from South Carolina consumers, five times more than their counterparts using a phone to perpetrate grant scams.

This new twist begins with scammers cloning a Facebook account, using someone's name and profile picture. The scammer then sends friend requests to consumers in the original account holder's friends list. The scammer contacts the newly added "friends," touting a way to obtain free grant money from the government. Sometimes scammers will include a list of other Facebook friends who have purportedly received money in an attempt to legitimize the scam. The link included in the message, though, is phony and often requests personal information along with a payment to cover processing fees.

Consumers should stay on guard online and:

- Remember real government grant programs don't require upfront payments to receive the grant.
- Regularly monitor Facebook security settings and set their profile to private.
- Never share personal or financial information through potentially unsecure means such as email or Facebook.
- Check their friend list for the person before accepting the request. If something seems out of the ordinary, call your friend directly.
- "Unfriend" anyone sending suspicious messages immediately.

Scam reporting is an important step in helping SCDCA empower consumers to recognize and avoid scams. To report a scam or obtain a copy of "Ditch the Pitch: A Guide for Guarding Against Scams," call 844-835-5322 or visit www.consumer.sc.gov, then click Report a Scam.

About SCDCA

The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs aims to protect consumers from inequities in the marketplace through advocacy, complaint mediation, enforcement and education. To file a complaint or get information on consumer issues, visit www.consumer.sc.gov or call toll-free, 1-800-922-1594.

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