In the afternoon on Friday, August 7, an individual claiming to be Lieutenant Marcus Robbins with the Bonners County Sheriff’s Office called a family member’s work phone and left a message. He asked her to return his call at 208-494-2555, which he referred to as his “direct office line.”

My family member returned the call and left a voicemail.  Shortly after doing so, the individual claiming to be Lieutenant Robbins called back from a different number: 208-265-5525.  He advised her that there were “pending” or not-yet finalized warrants for her arrest due to her failure to appear for jury duty and for contempt of court. Over the course of about 40 minutes, the individual told my family member the following story:

       In June 2020, the U.S. Marshal’s office sent one or more individuals to her home and personally served a jury summons to appear for a federal district court trial.

       Someone at their home signed my family member’s name, accepting service of the summons.

       The trial took place in early August and my family member did not show up for jury service.

       The judge therefore issued two “pending” warrants for her arrest: (1) failure to appear, and (2) contempt of court.

       The warrants could be removed by choosing one of two options: address them as a civil matter, or a criminal one.

       To resolve the issue civilly, my family member needed to go to a public retailer and purchase a “voucher card” in the amount of the fine that the court had imposed on her—anywhere from $500 to $2,500.

       My family member stressed that no U.S. Marshal had come to the house, and that she had not signed any document.

       The individual on the phone explained that she could resolve the entire problem by buying the voucher cards, paying the fine, and then coming into the local sheriff’s office to give a handwriting sample to prove she did not sign the summons and, after that, receiving a refund of the amount of the voucher cards.

       Throughout the call he stressed that everything needed to be resolved on that call.  My family member could not hang up, discuss the issue with her family, and then call back.  Doing so, according to the person claiming to be the lieutenant, would make the warrant “official” and damage her credibility and standing in the community by creating a criminal record for her.

Throughout the call I expressed my doubt as to the truth of the allegations and the entire scenario.  At one point, the alleged Lieutenant asked me to enter his phone number into Google to confirm the call came from the Bonners County Sheriff’s Office (it did).  In response to my further skepticism the individual who called my family member claimed to forward the call to his superior (a second scammer involved in the scheme).  He was more aggressive and likewise demanded that she pay the fine or face the consequences.

At this point, I told the callers I was placing them on hold to discuss the matter with my family member.  I then called the Bonners County Sheriff’s Office—using the same number that the scammers used to call her (208-265-5525)—and spoke to an individual who confirmed it was all a hoax.  She confirmed that there is, in fact, a Lieutenant Robbins but the man I was speaking to on the other line was not him.

After that, I returned to the scam call.  I told the man claiming to be Lieutenant Robbins that I had confirmed it was a scam by calling the actual Sheriff’s office.  He said some inappropriate remarks and hung up.

The entire call—from when she answered to when the scammer hung up—lasted over 40 minutes.  Both scammers were very aggressive and persistent, and their spoofing/use of the actual Sheriff’s number gave them at least some credibility.