

State Attorney William Scheiner

The Monthly Brief

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Protect yourself from card skimmers at gas stations

Illegal credit card skimmers hidden in gas pumps remain a threat in Central Florida. In just two days in December, an operation led by the U.S. Secret Service recovered seven skimmers at businesses in Seminole, Orange and Osceola counties.

The fraudsters are mostly transnational organized crime groups that travel the United States “and know what they’re doing,” the Secret Service explained. They now use internal devices called “shimmers” for chip cards and Bluetooth to transmit data wirelessly, making them harder to spot than older external skimmers.

Tips from the Secret Service and Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (which inspects pumps) to protect your card information and money:

Use tap-to-pay (contactless). This is the safest method as the card isn't inserted into a device that could read it.

Choose “credit.” If using a debit card at a gas station, run it as a credit card to avoid entering a PIN number. Credit cards offer better fraud protection than debit cards.

Pick gas pumps closest to the physical building. Thieves placing skimmers are less likely to put them in pumps where a store attendant might catch them in the act.

Take a close look at the pump: Avoid using pumps that are open or unlocked, have had the tamper-evident security tape cut or removed, or otherwise appear unusual.

Look for the “green lock.” Some newer pumps have encrypted credit card readers noted by illuminated green lock symbols near the reader.

What to do if you suspect a skimmer

- First, tell the gas station attendant.
- Then, call 1-800-HELP-FLA (800-435-7352) to file a report with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.
- Monitor your account online for unauthorized transactions



X/Al illustration

Tariff buzz inspires new ways to scam you

In the wake of shifting U.S. trade policies, scammers are capitalizing on public confusion over tariffs — taxes on imported goods — to fleece unsuspecting victims. The Better Business Bureau and cybersecurity experts have reported a surge in these frauds, often exploiting economic anxieties for quick gains.

One prevalent scam is the “tariff rebate” hoax, where fraudsters send texts or emails promising \$2,000 checks from tariff revenues or programs like the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). They demand personal details or small fees to “process” the payout, only to vanish with your info.

Another is the “tariff delay” con in online shopping. Fake retailers that run real-looking online ads claim your order is stuck in customs due to tariffs. They use that as an excuse to not repay your money or to demand more to “expedite” shipping.

Government impersonation rounds out the top tariff-inspired scams, with calls or messages from phony officials requesting tariff fees via gift cards or crypto.

To shield yourself and others:

- Verify any unsolicited offer by contacting official sources directly — never click provided links.
- Ignore demands for upfront payments, especially in unusual forms like gift cards; legitimate entities don't operate that way.
- Report fraud to the Federal Trade Commission or Better Business Bureau.

Law & Order News



State Attorney launches Special Victims Units to protect most vulnerable crime victims

State Attorney William Scheiner has launched Special Victims Units (SVUs) in Brevard and Seminole counties to better support vulnerable crime victims while pursuing justice for them in court.

These teams of veteran prosecutors and victim advocates will specialize in cases involving sexual abuse, domestic violence and child abuse — crimes that inflict profound trauma on victims and families. The SVUs will improve outcomes by building expert criminal cases while minimizing stress on victims, Scheiner said.



Scheiner

“For the vast majority of crime victims, their first exposure to law enforcement, the court system and prosecutors is not something they asked for, it’s something they’re thrust into,” Scheiner said. “I made a promise to myself and everybody else that I would continue to advocate for victims and make sure they have any services they need to feel safe.”

Special Victims Units can streamline case management, allowing prosecutors to focus on strengthening evidence and understanding emerging trends such as online stalking, grooming and exploitation. The units also foster collaboration with police agencies, some of which have their own SVUs, as well as social services for women and children to keep them secure during prosecution and after.

Scheiner, who took office in January, established the SVUs with existing resources by refocusing existing staff and public funding.

Both units will be headed by veteran prosecutors who most recently specialized in child- and sex-abuse cases: Julia Lynch in Brevard County and Martine McCarthy in Seminole County. The teams also will include veteran domestic-abuse prosecutors and victim advocates.

‘Her voice was heard,’ her molester sentenced to life

A Port St. John man has been sentenced to life in prison for sexually abusing an adolescent girl in his care.

A jury convicted KENNETH A. GUODACE, 39, on Dec. 5 of two counts of sexual battery on a victim younger than 12 and two counts of lewd or lascivious molestation of a child younger than 12. The guilty verdicts, secured by prosecutors Sara Flenniken and Jennifer Mostert, mandated a life sentence without parole. Testimony by the victim was key.

“A young girl was afraid of speaking out about her abuse,” Flenniken said. “Now, five years after the abuse began, her voice was heard and she knows that she will never have to endure that abuse again.”

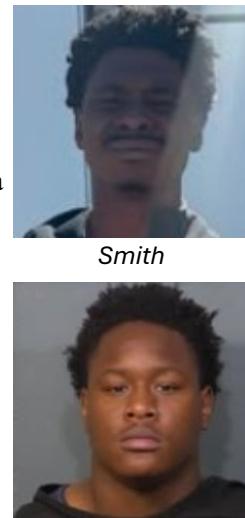


Guodace

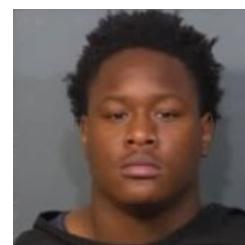
Prosecutors to seek death penalty for assault-rifle attack on 15-year-old girl

The State Attorney’s Office will seek the death penalty for two men for the ambush shooting of a 15-year-old girl and two companions outside a Cocoa-area restaurant Oct. 6.

JONTERICH L. SMITH, 21, and XAZAVIER E. BUTLER, 20, were indicted for first-degree murder with a firearm for the killing of Ka’Ryah Duncan as she sat in a car outside a seafood-and-chicken restaurant on Clearlake Road. Both also were charged with two counts of attempted first-degree murder for wounding two 18-year-old men from Palm Bay who drove with Duncan to the restaurant.



Smith



Butler

Among the aggravating factors cited by Assistant State Attorney Kari Kies: The defendants “knowingly created a great risk of death to many persons;” and the murder “was committed in a cold, calculated, and premeditated manner.”

Brevard County Sheriff’s investigators say Smith went to the restaurant for carry-out food and saw the victims, who he knew, in the parking lot. Smith drove away in a Dodge Durango for a few moments, then returned. Smith and Butler then climbed out of the black SUV with assault rifles and fired dozens of rounds at the victims, killing Duncan. Security video recorded the attack.

Smith and Butler remain held without bond in the Brevard County Jail.