

## Recent Cyber Fraud Task Force Sentencing Puts Gift Card Scams Front and Center

*AG shares tips to help consumers avoid fraud*



Our Cyber Fraud Task Force was pleased to help put these criminals in federal prison. Schemes like these undermine businesses and hurt hardworking Mississippians. But a savvy consumer is a con artist's worst nightmare. Arm yourself with these tips to identify and avoid scams to keep from becoming a victim. And remember to report scams to law enforcement to keep others from falling victim, too.

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*Lynn Fitch*

**(Jackson, Mississippi)** Given the recent sentencings of Sean Matthew Langston and John Carleton Johnson, Jr., who were found in possession of approximately 322 gift cards valued at more than \$12,000, 17 re-encoded instruments containing stolen bank card data, and two magstripe encoding devices, Attorney General Fitch shared tips to help consumers avoid becoming victims of fraud. Evidence photos and mugshots can be found below.

“Our Cyber Fraud Task Force was pleased to help put these criminals in federal prison,” **said Attorney General Lynn Fitch**. “Schemes like these undermine businesses and hurt hardworking Mississippians. But a savvy consumer is a con artist's worst nightmare. Arm yourself with these tips to identify and avoid scams to keep from becoming a victim. And remember to report scams to law enforcement to keep others from falling victim, too.”

### Common scams using gift cards can include:

- **Law Enforcement Imposter Scams:** Caller poses as a law enforcement official demanding that a fine must be paid to avoid arrest or legal action. Law enforcement and government agencies will never ask for payment by gift card.
- **Tech Support Scams:** A call or email informing you that there is an issue with your computer, and you must provide payment via gift card to fix it. Remember, troubleshooting or tech support will be initiated by you.
- **Charity Imposter Scams:** Requests from a fake charity requesting a financial donation. Verify a charity's registration status on an independent site like [Charity Navigator](#).
- **Utility Imposter Scams:** Demands that payment via gift card is required right away to avoid shut off for an unpaid or late utility bill. Your utility providers will never request payment by gift card.
- **Sweepstakes, Lottery Winnings, or Inheritance Scams:** A request for up-front fees to be paid via gift card before any winnings can be collected.

### How to Identify, Stop, and Report Scams:

- Never use gift cards to pay debts. Gift cards are intended for gifting—not for paying bills or fines.
- Be skeptical of urgent payment requests. Legitimate organizations will not pressure you to act immediately.

- Verify claims independently. Contact the company or individual directly using independently verified contact information. Do not use contact information the scammer provides.
- If you paid a scammer with a gift card, tell the company that issued the card right away and report it to law enforcement.
- Be cautious with online and phone interactions. Don't share gift card details unless you are sure of the recipient's legitimacy.

This month, the second defendant in a gift card scheme, Sean Matthew Langston, was sentenced by U.S. Southern District of Mississippi Court **Judge Kristi Johnson** to serve 16 months in the custody of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, followed by a three-year supervised release, for one count of Illegal Possession, Production, or Trafficking in Device-Making Equipment. This case was investigated by the Mississippi Attorney General's Office and the United States Secret Service through their partnership in the Cyber Fraud Task Force, with assistance from the Mississippi Highway Patrol, Mississippi Bureau of Investigation, and Jackson Police Department. The case was prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Mississippi.

His accomplice, John Carleton Johnson, Jr., was sentenced in November 2025 to serve 24 months in the custody of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, followed by a three-year supervised release. The two men were found to be in possession of approximately 322 gift cards valued at more than \$12,000, 17 reencoded instruments containing stolen bank card data, and two magstripe encoding devices.

To report fraud, scams, or deceptive business practices, contact the Attorney General's Office at [consumer@ago.ms.gov](mailto:consumer@ago.ms.gov) or click [here](#) to complete an online complaint form.



*Sean Matthew Langston*



*John Carleton Johnson Jr.*



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