

# BUSINESSSAFE

*BusinessSafe is designed to aid businesses in protecting the safety and well-being of Florida's residents and visitors from threats. BusinessSafe provides private sector partners with open source information, analysis and resources to help protect their businesses and communities.*

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## BusinessSafe Threat Topic – Certificate of Status Scam

Establishing a business is an exciting but daunting task, requiring a business plan, funding, filing of paperwork, and several other tasks. The last thing a new business owner should have to be concerned with is discerning between true and false solicitations. Unfortunately, newly established businesses are prime targets for a very specific type of scam, Certificate of Status scams. An official Certificate of Status document is provided by the Florida Secretary of State's office and may be needed in a few select situations, such as when merging separate companies or registering the company in another state. The scam letters will have the appearance of an official document, may contain a logo that resembles a state seal and have corporate names with words such as "certificate service," "certificate filing service," or "state filing corporation." The letter may convey urgency using wording like "Important! Follow instructions exactly," "Respond by," and "Official use only" written in bold print and possible red lettering. The State of Florida provides these documents for a fee ranging from \$5 - \$10 but the letters will ask for amounts which far exceed this, typically in the \$50 - \$100 range. Some businesses offering to provide the certificate are legitimate; however, presenting themselves as an official government entity is fraudulent and a crime.

### Signs It's a Scam

- Receiving a letter – Florida's Secretary of State will never send a letter soliciting a company to purchase this document.
- Use of wording which implies the purpose of the letter in the name of the company, ex. certificate service, certified filing service, Florida certificate service, etc.
- The letter has a logo which slightly resembles a state seal but uses the name of the company instead of the official seal wording.
- Claims that the certificate is needed for opening a bank account, obtaining a loan, filing taxes, or otherwise engaging in business.



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## How to Protect Your Business

- Always inspect any letter which appears to be from the state government for a seal and compare it to the State of Florida's official seal.
- If the company is offering a legitimate service, they will discreetly insert language which states the service is optional.
- Speak with someone at the Secretary of State's office about the letter.
- Reach out to your business's legal advisor.
- DO NOT send money to the company.

## Ways to Report & Resources

- Contact the Florida Attorney General's Office to [file a complaint](#).
- Visit the Secretary of State's [Sunbiz website](#) for contact information, resources for your business, and to order an official Certificate of Status document.
- Report scams to the Federal Trade Commission on their [website](#).



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