



**State Attorney**  
**18th Judicial Circuit**  
Brevard and Seminole County



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# The Monthly Brief

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## BBB warns of summer travel scams

Planning a summer getaway? The Better Business Bureau has issued an urgent consumer alert regarding a rise in travel and vacation scams. Fraudsters are targeting travelers with schemes designed to steal money and personal information.

To ensure your dream vacation doesn't turn into a financial nightmare, watch out for these common problems:

**Off-platform bookings:** Hosts on Airbnb or VRBO who urge you to pay via outside links.

**Lookalike websites:** Fake hotel or airline sites that mimic trusted brands on search engines.

**Phony rentals:** High-quality listings for properties that do not exist or are not owned by the seller.

**"Free" vacation vouchers:** Unsolicited calls or emails offering free trips that require upfront "fees."

Scammers rely on high-pressure urgency and often demand untraceable payment methods like wire transfers, gift cards, cryptocurrency, or peer-to-peer apps like Zelle.



Gemini/AI illustration

Protect your wallet and peace of mind by following these essential safety steps:

**Keep payments secure:** Never leave official platforms to communicate or pay.

**Use credit cards:** Credit cards offer the strongest fraud dispute protection if things go wrong.

**Verify listings:** Run a reverse-image search on rental photos and check Google Street View.

**Research first:** Look up companies and read verified complaints on BBB.org.

What should you do if you get ripped off? Here's who to contact first:

**Your financial institution:** Call the number on the back of your card right away. This is critical to locking down your account and initiating a fund recovery process.

**The booking platform:** If you found the listing on a major site like Airbnb or VRBO, immediately report the host to their internal customer support to trigger their built-in consumer protection programs.

**Local law enforcement:** File a non-emergency police report. This creates an official paper trail, which banks frequently require to process high-value fraud claims.

**The Federal Trade Commission:** Report the crime at 1-877-382-4357.

## Do's and Don'ts of QR codes

QR codes appear on everything from restaurant tables to product packaging and digital advertisements. But scammers love them too, using them to direct you to phishing websites, steal login details, or install malware on your device. Here's a quick guide to staying safe.

### Do:

- Scan QR codes from reputable, known sources like official company apps, trusted retailers, or physical locations you're familiar with.
- Use a QR code scanner that shows the full URL beforehand. Review it for spelling errors or suspicious domains that mimic legitimate ones.
- Keep your smartphone's operating system and security software up to date to block potential threats from malicious links.
- If the QR code leads to a login or payment page, manually type the official website address instead of clicking through.



QR code to our website, SA18.org

### Don't:

- Scan QR codes found in unsolicited emails, text messages, or random flyers and posters. These are common vectors for fraud.
- Enter sensitive information like passwords, credit card numbers, or personal details on websites reached via QR codes without thorough verification.
- Download any apps, files, or software prompted after scanning a QR code, as this could install malware.
- Ignore any security alerts from your browser or antivirus program following a scan – heed them and close the page.

# Law & Order News



## FWC names Vicari 'Prosecutor of the Year'

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has named Seminole County Assistant State Attorney Christina Vicari as its Prosecutor of the Year for the northeast region.

Vicari has collaborated with FWC officers to strengthen poaching investigations and boating-under-the-influence cases for prosecution in state courts. She also has helped FWC investigators navigate Florida's new law allowing residents to shoot bears out of season if they are in fear of imminent attack.

"The extensive work they do on behalf of Florida wildlife is really important, and I'm happy to do the legal groundwork for them," Vicari said of the FWC officers and their mission. "I love and care for our wildlife – I don't like it when people hurt animals."

Vicari was nominated for the honor by Lt. Garrett Mendelson, FWC law enforcement supervisor for Seminole and Orange counties.

"Her involvement has strengthened case quality, improved prosecutorial outcomes, and reinforced officer confidence throughout the judicial process," Mendelson said.

Vicari has worked for the State Attorney's Office for the 18th Judicial Circuit in Sanford for about eight years. She is a Winter Park native and a graduate of the University of Central Florida and Stetson University College of Law.

FWC leaders presented her with the prosecutor-of-the-year award June 16 at the state agency's regional meeting in Daytona Beach.



FWC photo

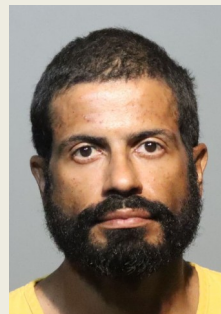
## Death sought for man who raped girl, recorded it as child porn

The State Attorney's Office will seek the death penalty for a Sanford man who recorded himself raping, molesting, and exposing himself to two child relatives while also trafficking child pornography.

The Seminole County Grand Jury indicted DANIEL E. RODRIGUEZ, 35, on dozens of charges including sexual battery on a child younger than 12, promoting a sexual performance by a child, and possession of material depicting sexual conduct by a child.

It is the first case in Florida's 18th Judicial Circuit of prosecutors seeking the death penalty for especially heinous sex crimes against children that do not result in death. The Florida Legislature passed a law in 2023 that permits such sentencing in extreme cases.

Rodriguez became the target of an investigation by the Seminole County Sheriff's Office after the Sanford Police Department received a tip from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that included two digital video files showing child pornography. Investigators connected those videos — plus nearly 300 other photos and videos depicting child sexual abuse that had moved over the internet — to a Verizon account with a mobile phone number assigned to Rodriguez.



## Life sentence for burglary, killing of Palm Bay retiree

A burglar who faced the death penalty for killing a Palm Bay retiree in his home will instead serve life in prison without parole under a plea agreement supported by the victim's children.

JUSTIN GIAMBANCO, 34, pled no-contest and was sentenced June 3 for the first-degree murder of Paul Black, 68, and related charges of armed burglary, false imprisonment and grand theft of a firearm from the 2023 robbery. In exchange, Assistant State Attorney Samantha Barrett agreed not to seek the death penalty at trial.

Giambanco also pled no-contest and was found guilty in five other cases involving burglary, aggravated assault and grand theft in Brevard County.

At his sentencing hearing in Viera, Black's youngest child, Jennifer Ali, remembered her father as a supportive friend, engineer, musician, and Air Force veteran who "wanted to visit places he hadn't been to and go to more of his grandchildren's birthday parties."

## 'Senseless act:' Brevard man gets prison for stabbing dog

A Palm Bay man has been sent to prison for stabbing his dog, Doobie, in the eye with scissors in an apparent attempt to kill him.

Judge Kathryn Speicher sentenced PAUL R. HEINEMANN, on June 23 to five years in state prison for animal cruelty resulting in pain or suffering, the maximum for the third-degree felony. Brevard County prosecutors Alfred Marten and Bernadette Serafinowicz convicted Heinemann, 37, at a May trial.

"The dog did not provoke Mr. Heinemann, the dog did not attack Mr. Heinemann, there was no reason for this to occur," Marten told the judge. "It was a senseless act."