

I wish to make the public in general, and lawyers in particular, aware of a counterfeit check scam targeting lawyer trust accounts.

Our firm was contacted by email referral from our Lawyers.com web site by a person claiming to need the assistance of a lawyer to collect on a \$500,000 divorce settlement from her ex-husband. This person claimed to live in Hong Kong while her husband was purported to live in Canada. These types of requests are not unusual at a law firm, with the possible exception that in this case both parties were outside the United States.

We forwarded a fee agreement by email and requested a retainer. The fee agreement was returned signed, but the promised retainer was never wired to our trust account. The party also forwarded a purported copy of the "collaborative divorce agreement" that was signed by her and her husband. The document contained no court information. We searched the Colorado courts database and could find no divorce case with these names.

Shortly after we were retained I received an email indicating that the husband had become very concerned when he heard that a law firm had been hired and had agreed to immediately send a portion of the judgment made payable directly to our firm. While it is not unusual for settlement funds to be routed through counsel, the fact that the client was proposing this made me immediately suspicious, and I alerted my staff to a possible fraud case.

A couple of weeks ago I received a further email from the client stating that a check had been mailed and asking for confirmation of its receipt the moment it arrived. A couple of weeks past and nothing arrived. I received yet another email from the client asking if the check had arrived.

Yesterday I returned to the office from mediation to find that a letter had indeed arrived by mail with a letter from the supposed ex-husband and a Cashier's Check in the amount of \$300,000. The check looked real in all respects, and the accompanying letter pleaded for patience in paying the balance of the judgment.

Still suspicious of the circumstances it was decided that we would refer the check to our bank for manual processing and verification. Before we had the opportunity to do that, we received a letter from the United States Customs and Border Protection division of the Department of Homeland Security indicating that the department had seized a counterfeit check in the amount of \$300,000 on December 9th at its facility in Indianapolis. I contacted the department this morning and Ms. Sharon Cummings at that office confirmed that we were being targeted by an international fraud ring. We were advised to destroy the check and to kindly spread the word that law firms across the country are being targeted with some success and to inform our colleagues.

Your assistance in making lawyers and the public aware of this scam is appreciated. I can be contacted at the numbers below for further information. I have enclosed in the attached file copies of the letter from U.S. Customs and the counterfeit check itself.