

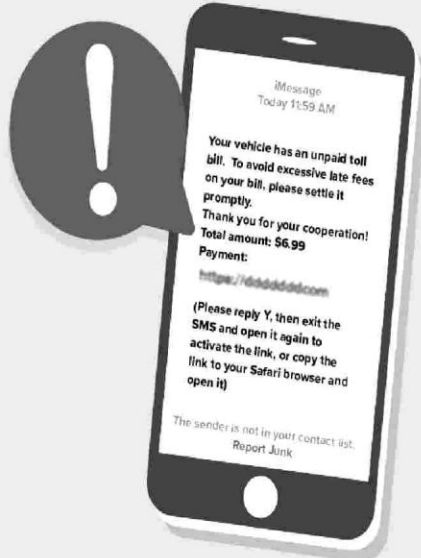
DETROIT NATIVE SUN

AG Nessel issues new consumer alert on toll or ticket scams

Education Department dismissed 90% of discrimination cases, report says

Got a text telling you to pay “overdue toll charges”?

It's probably a scam.



LANSING - As Michiganders are increasingly targeted by fraudulent text messages claiming unpaid tolls or tickets, Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel is issuing a new consumer alert to help residents avoid these scams. Toll and ticket scams are designed to steal personal and financial information by creating a false sense of urgency.

“Fake toll and ticket texts have been sent to phones across Michigan for a while now, but fraudsters are constantly evolving to try to steal our hard-earned money,” said Attorney General Nessel. “This alert will help residents stay a step ahead of these scams. Remember, if you receive one of these texts, don’t respond. Report them as spam on your device.”

Over the past year, the Department of Attorney General’s Consumer Protection Team has received hundreds of complaints of fraudulent texts. Common versions of a toll or ticket scam include fake court notices, impersonations of government agencies, or fraudulent messages from private toll companies.

Recently, scam messages have included an image claiming to be a “Notice of Civil Infraction Hearing.” The notice (PNG) falsely claims to be from a district court. The message falsely warns that recipients must appear in person for a hearing or admit responsibility and pay a penalty before the hearing date. The scam also includes a QR code that leads to a deceptive website.

Other variations of the scam texts claim to be from government agencies (PNG), such as the Michigan Department of Transportation or Secretary of State, or private companies (PNG) like SunPass or E-ZPass. These fraudulent messages may demand immediate payment for unpaid tolls or fines. They also include fake links made to appear official.

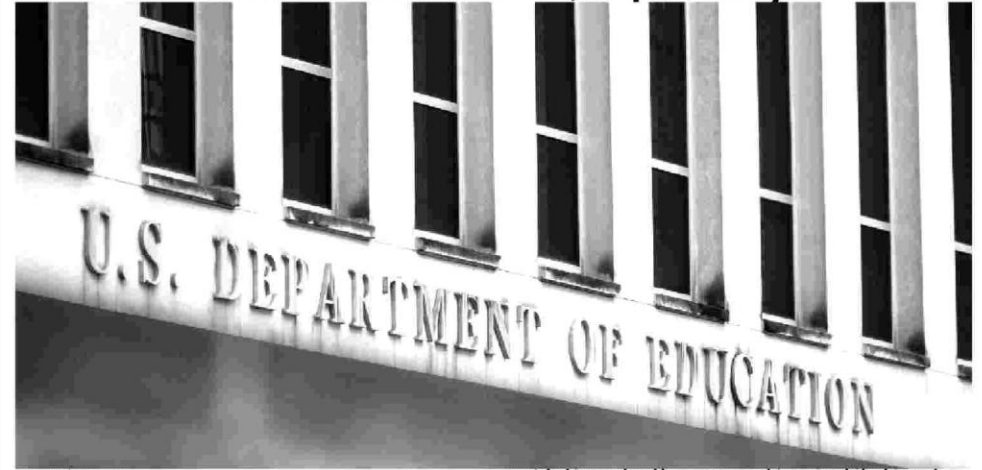
Government agencies will not text residents to demand money. They will mail them a notice and offer payment options. They will not ask for or take payment by prepaid gift card, wire transfer, cryptocurrency, or a payment app.

Consumers may have received a fake toll scam text if it:

- Is unsolicited.
- Is sent from an unusually long phone number (10 or more digits).
- Includes a link that is likely shortened or scrambled.
- Is written with a sense of urgency.
- Contains grammatical and spelling errors.
- Requests personal or financial information.

Consumers should not reply to these texts or click on links or attachments. Instead, they should use built-in spam-blocking tools on their mobile devices. Consumers can report smishing texts by forwarding them to SPAM (7726) and by sending the texts to the Federal Trade Commission.

To file a complaint with the Attorney General, or get additional information, contact:
 Consumer Protection Team
 P.O. Box 30213
 Lansing, MI 48909
 517-335-7599



By Alvin Buyinza
 Word In Black

(WIB) - The Education Department office responsible for protecting the rights of marginalized and minority students in the nation’s K-12 public schools dismissed nearly every discrimination complaint it received last year, due to the Trump administration’s massive reduction in force, according to a new government watchdog report.

At the same time, the Government Accountability Office found that the administration’s attempt to lay off about half of the department’s Office for Civil Rights — a move that was challenged in court — may have cost taxpayers as much as \$38 million over the nine months it took to resolve the case.

The volume of discrimination cases the civil rights office dismissed and the price tag for gutting the office highlight the dramatic effects of the Trump administration’s twin goals for public education: dismantling the Education Department and waging a so-called “war on woke” that would end federal enforcement of civil rights law.

The Office of Civil Rights Is In “Turmoil”
 Katy Neas, CEO of The Arc of the United States, said in a statement that the GAO report shows how the civil rights office has been “thrown into turmoil” even as discrimination complaints compound and vanish from the public eye.

“Families have a right to turn to OCR when a child is denied accommodations, pushed out of class, harassed, or disciplined unfairly because of disability,” said Neas, whose organization protects disability rights. “When those complaints aren’t addressed, schools lose clear direction, families lose answers, and students live with the consequences for years.”

“Rights are only meaningful when enforcement exists,” she said.

On the campaign trail, President Donald Trump promised to shutter the Education Department. In March, Trump laid off nearly half of the OCR staff and shuttered seven of the department’s 12 regional offices. But a federal judge blocked the move last summer.

While the case was ongoing, the Trump administration put the employees on administrative leave and told them not to report to work. That meant taxpayers were still paying their salaries, even though they were not actually working.

Between March 11 and September 23, 2025, the department’s Office of Civil Rights received over 9,000 complaints alleging discrimination, according to a report from the Government Accountability Office. More than 7,000 of those complaints — around 90% — were dismissed.

In 2025, OCR, under the Trump administration, only reached a resolution agreement in just two out of 14 racial harassment cases, according to the OCR.

What Is The Office of Civil Rights?
 The Education Department’s OCR is the sector that handles cases of discrimination against race, sex, disability, religion and age in schools and colleges. The office investigates these complaints and sends out

guidelines to the respective institution to comply with civil rights law.

Complaints can be dismissed for a variety of reasons, the report says. In the GAO’s 2021 report on school bullying, for example, changes to OCR’s guidance led to a sharp uptick in dismissals of bullying complaints. The dismissal rate also jumped from 49% of resolved complaints in the 2010-2011 school year to 81% in the 2019-2020 school year.

But compared to prior years and administrations, the department, under Trump’s second term, is dismissing far more complaints and issuing fewer resolutions. Experts say this could lead to more civil rights abuses going unnoticed.

Even with its workforce slashed by half, the OCR is still receiving discrimination complaints.

Discrimination Complaints Are Worsening
 Beth Gellman-Beer, who led the OCR’s regional office in Philadelphia before being laid off in March, says her office had 1,000 cases on the docket when her team received notice that it would be cut. Under the Trump administration, the bigoted behavior her office investigated had become more egregious.

She cited a case from 2024 concerning students at a Pennsylvania high school who wore Confederate flag attire during the school’s homecoming week.

The students posted on social media that anyone who had a problem with the Confederate flag should “go down south and call a white person racist and see what happens.”

Parents, teachers and community leaders alerted school officials, according to the complaint. Although school administrators forced students to remove their attire, they also insisted they didn’t believe the behavior amounted to racial harassment.

Gellman-Beer says she often thinks about that case and similar cases. Without a robust OCR workforce, there’s virtually no one available to ensure schools comply with civil rights laws.

“No one’s following up on those cases. That’s what keeps me up at night,” she says.

Millions of Dollars Spent on Mass Layoffs
 The GAO report found that the mass layoffs Trump called for may have cost up to \$38 million in salaries and benefits for OCR workers who weren’t working between March and December.

The Education Department also failed to account for all possible costs and savings associated with its mass layoffs and reorganization, according to the report. Furthermore, the department didn’t detail its analyses despite direction from the Office of Management and Budget and the Office of Personnel Management.

“Without fully accounting for costs and savings and documenting its analyses, [the Education Department] lacks reasonable assurance that its actions achieved the stated goal of reforming its federal workforce to maximize efficiency and productivity, including whether such actions improved service to the American people, increased productivity, or saved taxpayer dollars.”

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