



Broome County OFFICE OF THE COUNTY CLERK

Aaron M. Martin, County Clerk

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Broome County Clerk Aaron Martin Warns of Potential Passport Scams

Binghamton, NY – Broome County Clerk Aaron Martin is warning the public about potential scams related to third-party service companies claiming to process U.S. passports. Customers are asked to pay a large “processing fee” and provide personal and sensitive information and documents such as driver licenses, birth certificates, social security numbers, etc. through various websites. After submitting this information and paying the fee, customers then receive instructions to visit a Passport Acceptance Agency for “further processing.” However, many of these websites misleadingly claim that they will manage the Passport processing. When the customers visit a Passport Acceptance Agency, such as the Broome County Clerk’s Office, they learn that they must still pay the standard fees to the U.S. Department of State and to the Clerk’s Office for photos and processing.

“We have had several customers visit our office over the past few weeks expressing that they have visited a website that claimed to process Passports, paid a large fee and then are directed to a Passport Acceptance Agency. Our customers are led to believe that they’re coming to our office to hand in their paperwork but then our staff informs them that the standard fee to the U.S. Department of State and to the Broome County Clerk’s Office are still required,” said Broome County Clerk Aaron Martin. “This is when the customer realizes they may have been scammed. Our office provides hands-on assistance with filling out the necessary forms free of charge. We are warning the public to be cautious when using third-party services claiming to process passports. Our Passport Agents are qualified by the Federal Government and must adhere to standard processing guidelines.”

Broome County Clerk Aaron Martin advises the public on the following:

1. **Misrepresentation of services.** A website may claim that it “processes” Passport applications. Customers move forward with entering their personal and sensitive information and the website appears to only accept a large “processing fee” and then requires them to visit a live Passport Agent (e.g., Clerk’s Office staff) to finalize and accept the application. Customers may reasonably believe they were paying for a complete service that the website is not providing.
→ Be on the lookout for disclaimers on the homepage of websites such as “Private service. Not affiliated with the U.S. government.” Be sure to only visit websites that are affiliated with the U.S. Department of State which will end with a .gov (e.g., <https://travel.state.gov>)
2. **Collection of sensitive personal documents.** The website requests copies of personal and sensitive documents such as driver licenses, birth certificates, social security numbers, etc. The Broome County Clerk’s Office cannot verify whether these websites are appropriate to collect these documents let alone have protocols in place to protect this sensitive information.



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→ Be suspicious of websites that do not end with a .gov requesting copies of personal documents. You may expose yourself to identity theft.

3. **Financial harm potential.** Customers have paid large “processing fees” for a service they did not receive.

→ New passports must be applied for in front of a Passport Agent. New passports cannot be processed online. Be suspicious of websites that are offering Passport processing services, especially for new Passports. Customers looking to renew their Passports may do so online but only through the U.S. Department of State: <https://travel.state.gov/en/passports/renew-replace/online.html>. The Broome County Clerk’s Office can review hard copy Passport renewal applications and take photos but they must be mailed in by the customer.

The standard fees for passports are \$130 for adult applications and \$100 for children under the age of 16. The standard fees for passport cards are \$30 for adults and \$15 for children under the age of 16. The standard fees for the Passport book or Passport card are payable to the U.S. Department of State. Further, there is a \$35 processing fee for each application and a \$10 fee for each Passport photo, payable to the Broome County Clerk if processing Passports with our office.

For more detailed information on how to apply for a U.S. Passport or find a legitimate Acceptance Facility, please visit: <https://travel.state.gov>.

For more information on the Broome County Clerk’s Office, hours and available services, please visit <https://broomecountyny.gov/clerk>.

The County Clerk is the Records Management Officer for records in Broome County and is an agent to the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles.

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