

ALERT FROM THE OFFICE OF PROSECUTOR SHERRI BEVAN WALSH

January 10, 2009

(Akron) ... There has been an e-mail going around titled *FAIRLAWN/MONTROSE ALERT!!* that I want to address to reduce the fear it is creating.

The e-mail follows:

I just wanted to let you all know that I spoke with our Fairlawn Police Officer friend today. He confirmed that this e-mail I had sent you is true. They have not caught the guy yet. He pulled someone over this past Friday night on Cleveland-Mass. Rd. He is in a white Caprice with the police lights. He wears all blue or black baseball hat that says 'POLICE'. If you should get pulled over by this person, call 911 immediately. Do not open your car window or door for him. He has been known to rape the women he stops.

We have talked to the Fairlawn Police Department and want to clarify the incident that occurred. The Fairlawn Police Department (which is patrolled by Bath and Copley as well) was called by the Akron Police Department and asked to investigate a call they had received that an African American man with a white Caprice was pulling over cars on the corner of Cleveland-Massillon Road. Copley Police were able to be at the reported location of the scene in 17 seconds. There was no one there. No man. No white Caprice. No cars pulled over. In addition, there were no reported individuals who had been pulled over or other witnesses.

We believe this e-mail is the result of someone not fully understanding two different incidents that have occurred, including one reported in the Akron Beacon Journal that occurred in Akron, and an unconfirmed incident investigated by Fairlawn Police.

On December 17, 2008, the *Akron Beacon Journal* reported the following story:

Shortly after 5:00 last night, a female reported that she was driving on Brittain Road at Hampton Road when she noticed a white Chevy Caprice with red and blue lights behind her vehicle. The female pulled over, believing that it was a male police officer. The male driver of the Caprice, wearing all black clothing and a baseball hat with POLICE on the brim, shut off the red and blue lights, and approached the female's car. The male then asked for the female's driver's license, which she gave to him. The male went back to his vehicle, and then re-approached asking the female to step back to his car. At this point the female didn't feel comfortable and she asked the male to call for another marked unit. The male got back into his car and drove off, keeping the female's driver's license.

The suspect is a white male, 30 - 40 years old. He is between 5'10" - 6'0" tall and weighs between 170 - 190 lbs. He had brown hair and brown eyes. He was wearing a black baseball hat with POLICE written in white letters, black zip up jacket, and black pants.

It is being reported in yet another e-mail that the Akron man who was impersonating a police officer was apprehended. That is not true.

Safety precautions when being pulled over by a police officer in a marked police cruiser:

- Pull over.
- Do not keep driving, as the officer will believe that you are fleeing and will give chase, which is dangerous to everyone.
- Once you have pulled over and if you are uncomfortable, roll the window down only enough to talk to the *uniformed* officer and ask them for additional identification. Each officer should be in uniform, and carry their badge and a separate identification card.
- If you are still uncomfortable, and you have a cell phone, call 9-1-1 to confirm the officer's presence.
- If you do not have a cell phone, ask the officer to call the radio room and to send a backup cruiser/officer to the scene.

Safety precautions when being pulled over by someone in an unmarked car with flashing lights:

- Be very careful and suspicious!
- Immediately call 9-1-1 to confirm if the stop is legitimate.
- *As a general rule, unless you are engaged in illegal drug activities, you will not be pulled over by an unmarked car.*
- The only other real police officer who might pull someone over in an unmarked car, would be officers on private property such as a school officer, or an officer with the Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority. These officers may not have marked police cars. If you are on these or similar private properties, pull over. These officers should still be in uniform and should carry a badge and identification.

In the end, I always say to use your instincts. If it doesn't feel right, it probably isn't. Call 9-1-1 to make sure.

Sheri Bevan Walsh
Summit County Prosecutor