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United States Attorney's Office
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17 People Indicted for Conspiring to Steal More Than \$2.4 Million in SNAP Benefits

PORTLAND, Ore.—17 people are facing federal charges for conspiring to defraud the United States of more than \$2.4 million in fraudulent Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) purchases, announced the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Oregon.

A coordinated, multi-agency law enforcement operation was conducted Tuesday to dismantle the interstate fraud organization that used skimming devices and stolen Electric Benefits Transfer (EBT) accounts to purchase SNAP-eligible products for resale on the black market.

“This group targeted a program that ensures access to healthy and affordable groceries for low-income and food insecure individuals and families,” said Natalie Wight, U.S. Attorney for the District of Oregon. “We thank all our partners for their commitment to protecting the integrity of vital public programs like SNAP.”

“The USDA OIG is working relentlessly with our law enforcement partners to dismantle organized skimming operations targeted at stealing EBT card information from victims relying on such benefits to feed their families. These conspirators used skimmed accounts to fraudulently purchase retail goods such as infant formula and energy drinks, and later resold the stolen goods for illicit gain. We thank the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Oregon, Homeland Security Investigations, Portland Police Bureau, Oregon Department of Justice, and Orange County District Attorney's Office for our joint effort in pursuing and holding these conspirators accountable for defrauding American families and the Federal Government,” said Special Agent-in-Charge Shawn Dionida, U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General (USDA OIG).

“This kind of fraud cheats a system that is designed to help families and children who need assistance the most,” said Special Agent in Charge Robert Hammer, who oversees Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) operations in the Pacific Northwest. “Every dollar stolen is a dollar that could have fed a child in need. I'm appreciative of our partnerships with federal and local law enforcement, as it is through investigations like this that we will be able to protect resources for those that rely on them, while making sure those who commit these abuses are held accountable.”

“Our role in this case started with the initiative and extensive follow-up by one of our detectives,” said Portland Police Bureau Chief Bob Day. “He then reached out to our federal

partners, and as the investigation grew, more resources were brought in to assist. It soon became very apparent how many people were criminally involved and the wide scope of this investigation. This indictment ultimately was the result of an exhaustive amount of investigative work by our detective and federal authorities and I commend everyone involved for their dedication to this important case.”

The following individuals have been arrested and charged with conspiring to defraud the United States, for their roles in the fraud organization:

Ramirez Dumitru, 25; Giovanni Spirea, 28; Santa-Madalina Costache, 25; Florin Mareata, 25; Anita Vaduva, 36; Ion Paul Miculescu, 19; Nicolas Barbosu, 25; Alberto Tomescu, 27; Oana Aura Cristina Caldararu, 23; Roberta Elena Sardaru, 27; Salvis Foro Dunca, 26; Ana Patricia Escalante, 57; Jessica Gonzalez, 27; Edwin Lionel Santizo-Ralon, 54; Cristina Yesenia Escalante, 33; Edgar Basilio Hernandez, 33; and Marta Hernandez de Estrada, 53.

According to court documents, from August 2023 to October 2024, Ramirez Dumitru and his co-conspirators are alleged to have possessed skimming devices and stolen EBT accounts to illegally purchase items with stolen SNAP benefits. Dumitru shared information with other members of the organization who, along with him, used the stolen EBT accounts to purchase large quantities of infant formula, energy drinks, and other SNAP-eligible nonperishable food items from grocery stores in Oregon, Washington, and California, and through websites associated with grocery stores offering curbside pickup.

Over the course of the conspiracy, the group purchased more than 120,000 pounds of goods and stored them at residential properties and storage units in Oregon and Washington until they were packaged and transported to California in private vehicles or via commercial carriers. The fraudulent goods, obtained with more than \$2.4 million in stolen SNAP benefits, were then sold on the black market.

All seventeen members of the organization were arrested on Tuesday without incident and made their initial appearances in federal court this week before U.S. Magistrate Judges in Oregon, Washington and California. All have been arraigned and are pending a trial in the District of Oregon.

The case was investigated by USDA OIG, HSI, U.S. Marshals Service, Portland Police Bureau, Oregon Department of Justice, Orange County District Attorney’s Office, Vancouver Police Department, San Bernardino Sheriff’s Office, Washington County Sheriff’s Office, Gresham Police Department, and the Redmond, Washington Police Department Financial Fraud and Identification Theft Task Force. It is being prosecuted by Geoffrey A. Barrow and Nicholas D. Meyers, Assistant U.S. Attorneys for the District of Oregon, with assistance from the U.S. Attorney’s Offices for the Western District of Washington and Central District of California.

An indictment is only an accusation of a crime, and a defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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