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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

AG Moody's Statewide Prosecutors and FDLE Shut Down Complex Cybercrime Scheme Involving Cryptocurrency and the Dark Web



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody's Office of Statewide Prosecution and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement shut down a complex criminal enterprise using the dark web and cryptocurrency to commit identity theft and launder money. An Orlando teen led the complex cybercrime operation. The lead defendant, Justin Vassell, used cryptocurrency to buy bundles of stolen personal information to open credit card accounts and purchase hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of merchandise.

The Florida Attorney General's Office and FDLE today announced the arrest of Justin Vassell, Jacqueline Vassell, Shannon Vassell, Marc Williams, Deonte Benejan and Lawrence Dority for the criminal enterprise that illicitly purchased more than $350,000 worth of merchandise, including ammunition and firearm parts. The group then sold the items to pawn shops around the Orlando area to obtain cash.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "The mastermind behind this complex cyber fraud scheme thought he could avoid detection by using stolen identities and cryptocurrency to conceal the crimes. But through the diligent efforts of my Statewide Prosecutors and FDLE

agents, the entire scheme was exposed and the criminals involved arrested."

FDLE Commissioner Mark Glass said, "Under the leadership of Attorney General Ashley Moody, the Office of Statewide Prosecution has been a tremendous partner in bringing to justice criminals who prey on our citizens. I am extremely proud of this investigation and our FDLE Orlando team. With more than 70 victims and thousands of dollars in fraudulent merchandise, our agents and analysts team did an outstanding job putting the pieces together on this case."

The multicircuit investigation by Attorney General Moody's OSP and FDLE began after FDLE Special Agents received a complaint from a business owner who suspected Justin Vassell stole nearly $90,000. Further investigation revealed that Vassell criminally victimized more than 70 citizens and 10 online merchants in a massive criminal scheme. The investigation uncovered that Vassell used cryptocurrency to purchase bundles of stolen personal identification information belonging to innocent victims on illicit websites.

Vassell then used the stolen identities to open credit cards and bank accounts in the victims' names to purchase more than $350,000 worth of merchandise, including ammunition and firearm parts, from online merchants. Vassell and the five other members of the criminal enterprise then sold the merchandise to pawn shops to obtain cash.

Justin Vassell and the five associates—Jacqueline Vassell, Shannon Vassell, Marc Williams, Deonte Benejan and Lawrence Dority—face charges of racketeering and conspiracy to commit racketeering. The charges of conspiracy to commit racketeering are comprised of more than 90 predicate incidents including: criminal use of personal identification information, money laundering, extortion and dealing in stolen property. Justin Vassell faces additional charges of grand theft of $100,000 or more, extortion and criminal use of personal identification information of more than 30 persons.

If convicted, Vassell could potentially face up to 135 years in prison.

Senior Assistant Statewide Prosecutor Whitney Mackay will prosecute the case.

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