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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

Attorney General Moody's Statewide Prosecutors File Criminal Charges Against 14 South Florida Retail Thieves for Causing $20 Million in Losses



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody, along with law enforcement partners, today announced the conclusion of a racketeering investigation, Operation On the Fence, that focused on a large retail theft criminal enterprise operating in South Florida. Attorney General Moody's Office of Statewide Prosecution is now filing criminal charges against 14 defendants for involvement in the retail theft ring. The criminal enterprise operated in at least nine judicial circuits and caused more than $20 million in losses to more than 20 different retailers across Florida—including Walmart, Target, Publix, Home Depot, Lowes and more. The stolen items ranged from over-the-counter medications and cosmetics to tools, electronics, Legos, and other household items.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "In Florida, we are fighting back against organized retail theft. We will not allow this crime, occurring rampantly in other parts of our country, to wreak havoc on our consumers and businesses. Thanks to great collaborative efforts between my Office of Statewide Prosecution and our amazing law enforcement partners, this massive criminal enterprise, which caused more than $20 million in losses, is out of business."

This joint investigation involved the partnership of several law enforcement agencies, including the Miami-Dade Police Department, the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office, the Broward Sheriff's Office, Homeland Security Investigations, the Coral Springs Police Department and the Pembroke Pines Police Department.

According to the investigation, dozens of serial retail thieves brought stolen items to a first-level illicit distributor, Arland Cata. Cata purchased the stolen merchandise from the thieves, valued at least $1 million, and paid the criminals 5% to 10% of the items' retail value. Cata then sold those items to a higher-level distributor, Joshua Markell. Markell owned an Amazon storefront, Hollywoodseller, to sell the stolen items to unsuspecting consumers across the country. This past year, the Hollywoodseller Amazon storefront made more than $5 million in sales. Markell paid Cata approximately $1.2 million for stolen merchandise from January to September. Markell and Cata employed several individuals that assisted with the inventory and transport of the stolen items to Amazon.

The investigation resulted in law enforcement seizing more than $1.2 million in stolen merchandise that Markell intended to sell on Amazon—more than 4,800 stolen items. Markell shipped more than 100,000 items to Amazon for the Hollywoodseller this year.

Stores impacted by this criminal enterprise include the following: Walgreens, CVS, Walmart, Publix, Winn Dixie, Fresco Y Mas, Navarro, Home Depot, Lowes, Dick's Sporting Goods, Target, Sam Ash, Best Buy, Harbor Freight, Guitar Center, Golf Galaxy, Macy's, BJ's, Costco—along with various pool supply stores and small music businesses.

Attorney General Moody's OSP is charging 14 individuals, including Markell, for involvement in this criminal enterprise. The charges include racketeering, organized retail theft, grand theft, dealing in stolen property and other conspiracy charges based on roles within the criminal enterprise. Attorney General Moody's Assistant Statewide Prosecutor Chris Olowin will handle the case. There is currently a separate ongoing investigation into the homicide of Cata.

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