

Combating Crime: Mayor Adams and Attorney General James Announce Take Down of Massive Retail Theft and Crime Operation

May 26, 2022

Video available at: <https://youtu.be/ZE8ESYcTtY>

Joint NYPD and OAG Investigation Charges 41 People for Stealing Millions of Dollars in Luxury and Drug Store Goods and Reselling them on eBay

NEW YORK – New York City Mayor Eric Adams and New York Attorney General Letitia James today announced the takedown of a massive retail theft operation in New York City that stole and resold millions of dollars in goods. As outlined in the indictment unsealed today, 41 people were charged for their roles in this crime ring that stole luxury clothing and goods and thousands of items from drug stores that were then resold on eBay. During the three-year joint investigation conducted by the New York City Police Department’s (NYPD) Grand Larceny Division and the Office of the Attorney General’s (OAG) Organized Crime Task Force (OCTF), law enforcement seized more than \$3.8 million worth of stolen retail items from the enterprise’s alleged boss, Roni Rubinov; more than 550 stolen gift and cash cards; and more than \$300,000 in cash. The defendants are being charged with various counts of enterprise corruption, money laundering, criminal possession of stolen property, scheme to defraud, and conspiracy.

“Today we are showing that New York City will not tolerate crime — street crime, retail crime, or organized crime,” said **Mayor Adams**. “Public safety is the prerequisite to prosperity, and so we want to be clear that we will investigate, arrest, and prosecute criminals when they break the law. This wasn’t just shoplifting, but people going into stores and clearing off shelves as part of an organized crime ring. This massive retail-theft scheme affected every level of our economy, from department stores to big chains to independent businesses — all of whom were already impacted by the COVID-19

pandemic. I want to thank Attorney General James for her partnership, the NYPD, and all our partners for working to make New York safer, stronger, and more prosperous.”

“Today’s takedown of this massive retail theft operation is part of our continued efforts to combat crime and restore an environment where all New Yorkers feel secure,” said **Attorney General James**. “These individuals stole millions of dollars in luxury goods and cleared the shelves of the drug stores in the communities we live and resold these goods for great profit. We will continue to work with our partners in law enforcement to crackdown on crime and protect all our communities.”

“The NYPD is committed to stopping anyone — and any enterprise — that threatens the well-being of the people we serve,” said **NYPD Commissioner Keechant L. Sewell**. “We are proud of this long-term, intelligence-driven investigation and of our partnerships with the State Attorney General’s Office, Homeland Security Investigations, and everyone who worked together to dismantle this criminal operation and arrest and prosecute its alleged participants to the fullest extent of the law.”

OCTF and the NYPD seized the following stolen goods:

- Designer clothing, handbags, belts, and shoes;
- Cosmetics;
- Over the counter medications;
- Miscellaneous drug store items;
- Tools and electronics;
- Coffee; and
- Over 550 gift cards from approximately 60 different retailers, including Amazon, Home Depot, Walgreens, Visa, Apple iTunes, Modell’s, Lowe’s, Kmart, American Express, and Pottery Barn.

OCTF and the NYPD also seized approximately \$300,000 from Rubinov’s residence, stash house, and business locations.

Through electronic and physical surveillance, analysis of financial records, and other investigative tools, the NYPD and the OAG found that since 2017, Rubinov, Yuriy Khodzhandiyev, and Rafik Israilov, Rubinov’s alleged managers, have been directing career larcenists (boosters) to steal specific merchandise and gift cards from retailers.

Rubinov and his managers then purchased the stolen goods for fractions of the retail price and resold them for profit on an eBay store called Treasure-Deals-USA.

The boosters brought stolen property to Rubinov's New Liberty Loans Pawn Shop — located at 67 W 47th Street and to Romanov Gold Buyers Inc. — located at 71 W 47th Street, Suite 402A. Rubinov employees (Akasya Yasaroglu, Lyudmila Yushuvayev A/K/A "Lyudmila Yadegar" A/K/A "Ludi", Zamira Shaganova, Erica Zambrano and Ramdass Ramkissoon A/K/A "Paulie") then purchased stolen clothing items for six-to-eight percent of their retail value and stolen pharmaceutical items and cosmetics at the rate of one-to-two dollars per item, depending on the brand. Rubinov regularly provided his employees with cash to pay for the stolen property, which was allocated to promote the ongoing procurement of stolen property.

Once the stolen property was purchased by Rubinov or his employees, it was stored at one of the locations in midtown Manhattan. It was then regularly transported by Fathi Negadi to Rubinov's residence and Rubinov's stash house, both located in Fresh Meadows, Queens. Ana Balaceanu, Fathi Negadi, Caroline Gallego, and Patrice Collins inventoried and organized the stolen property at the stash locations in Queens. Balaceanu, Yasaroglu, Collins, and Gallego then posted the stolen property for resale on Rubinov's Treasure-Deals-USA eBay store. Once the posted items were purchased, they were transported back to 71 W 47th Street to be packaged and subsequently shipped to Rubinov's eBay customers.

Since 2017, the Treasure Steals USA operation has sold more than \$1,373,728 of stolen property via Rubinov's eBay store.

In addition to Rubinov's on-site employees, Rubinov contracted a remote web designer and eCommerce consultant, Charles Harman. Harman maintained the eBay store front, used tools to increase its online visibility and traffic, and created additional sites for the enterprise.

In December of 2019, Rubinov signed a lease for a large warehouse space located in Fresh Meadows, New York, where he planned to open a "department store" like facility stocked with stolen property.

Additionally, the NYPD and OCTF uncovered that Rubinov procured New York City Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards and benefits from boosters in exchange for

cash. Rubinov directed Khodzhandiyev, Yasaroglu, and Shaganova to verify whether the boosters' personal EBT cards or accounts had active balances and to subsequently purchase the EBT benefits from the boosters in exchange for cash. Rubinov then used these EBT benefits to purchase groceries for his family.

The NYPD and OCTF alleges that Rubinov washed the illicit proceeds from the sale of stolen property through his PayPal account and subsequently through one of his bank accounts, thereby successfully concealing the proceeds from the sale of stolen property.

The NYPD and OCTF further alleges that Rubinov reinvested almost 60 percent of his eBay gross proceeds into the enterprise. Specifically, Rubinov and his employees reinvested funds for various illicit business expenses, such as cash withdrawals, which paid boosters for stolen property, payments made to Rubinov's employees, and marketing campaigns. These types of payments and expenses were the foundation of Rubinov's enterprise, which enabled Rubinov to continue to purchase and resell stolen property; and which perpetuated the flow of illicit proceeds into Rubinov's PayPal and bank accounts.

"This criminal enterprise allegedly operated as a shadow e-commerce business, utilizing boosters to procure stolen merchandise which they then sold to unsuspecting buyers on eBay under the guise of Rubinov's legitimate businesses," said **acting Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) New York Special Agent in Charge Ricky J. Patel**. "This complex and well-organized operation funneled their ill-gotten proceeds through numerous businesses in an effort to evade detection by law enforcement. Today's actions could not have been accomplished without the close cooperation and expertise of HSI Special Agents, the Attorney General's Organized Crime Task Force, and the NYPD's Grand Larceny Division."

"The business community thanks the attorney general for her initiative to disrupt the organized criminal activity that has done so much damage to consumers, business owners and retail workers over the past two years," said **Kathryn Wylde, president & CEO, Partnership for New York City**. "Internet sales of stolen goods have led to store closings and lost jobs. The actions announced today give us confidence that we will see an end to flagrant illegal activity that has proliferated during the pandemic."

The indictment — unsealed today before New York Supreme Court Justice Juan M. Merchan — charged the following individuals with Enterprise Corruption, Money Laundering in the First Degree, and other crimes in relation to their involvement in the organized retail theft and fencing operation. Each defendant, if convicted, faces up to 8 1/3 to 25 years in prison.

- Roni Rubinov, 42, Fresh Meadows, New York
- Yuriy Khodzhandiyev, 39, Forest Hills, New York
- Rafik Israilov, 56, Queens, NY
- Akasya Yasaroglu, 26, New York, NY
- Lyudmila Yushuvayev A/K/A “Lyudmila Yadegar” A/K/A “Ludi”, 46, Queens, NY
- Erica Zambrano, 43, New York, NY
- Fathi Negadi, 39, North Carolina
- Caroline Gallego, 36, France
- Ramdass Ramkissoo A/K/A “Paulie”, 64, Queens, NY
- Zamira Shaganova, 33, Brooklyn, NY
- Ana Balaceanu, 40, Queens, NY
- Charles Harman, 58, Erie County, NY

In addition to the 12 individuals charged with Enterprise Corruption, the following 28 individuals are charged with Criminal Possession of Stolen Property in the First Degree and other various other crimes, in relation to their involvement in the organized retail theft and fencing operation. Each defendant, if convicted, faces up to 8 1/3 to 25 years in prison.

- Patrice Collins, 67, New York, NY
- Salimou Dabo, 36, Guinea
- Jerard Iamunno A/K/A “Italiano”, 39, New York, NY
- Lance Fair, 31, New York, NY
- Cayla Roman, 23, New York, NY
- Kathleen Ragusa, 42, New York, NY
- Gregory Roosa, 49, New York, NY

- Jordan Cavaliero, 39, New York, NY
- Thomas Nicholas A/K/A “Tommy”, 33, New York, NY
- Eveylon Ferguson, 33, New York, NY
- Kevin Ruthenbeck, 35, New York, NY
- David Higgins, 48, New York, NY
- Justin Pepchinski, 43, New York, NY
- Daniel Weber, 36, New York, NY
- Patrick Casey, 41, New York, NY
- Shawn Herald, 40, New York, NY
- Shanon Winkler A/K/A “Shea”, 26, New York, NY
- James Bilis A/K/A “Slim”, 32, Hudson County, NJ
- Samantha Cotroneo, 30, Hudson County, NJ
- Herman Ellis, 48, New York, NY
- Chris Plamondon, 31, New York, NY
- Joshua Dvorin, 33, New York, NY
- Reagan Callihan A/K/A “Meagan”, 41, New York, NY
- Sharif Warner, 45, Brooklyn, New York
- Chase Bunt, 33, Ulster County, New York
- Michael Morris, 26, Brooklyn, New York
- Jabari Smith, 31, Brooklyn, New York
- Alonzo Roberts, 30, Brooklyn, New York

Lastly, the following eight individuals are charged with Criminal Use of a Public Benefit Card in the First and Second Degree and Welfare Fraud in the Third Degree, in relation to their role in the EBT theft scheme. Each defendant, if convicted of these charges, faces up to 2 1/3 to 7 years in prison.

- Roni Rubinov, 42, Fresh Meadows, New York
- Yuriy Khodzhandiyev, 39, Forest Hills, New York
- Akasya Yasaroglu, 26, New York, NY
- Zamira Shaganova, 33, Brooklyn, NY

- James Bilis A/K/A “Slim”, 32, Hudson County, NJ
- Justin Pepchinski, 43, New York, NY
- Kathleen Ragusa, 42, New York, NY
- Jacqueline Alessi, 34, Suffolk County, New York

The charges against the defendants are accusations and the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty in a court of law.

Mayor Adams, the NYPD, and the OAG thanks the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s El Dorado Task Force II - Major Frauds Group Special Agents Michael MacDonald and Kathleen Corbett for their long-term assistance on this investigation.

Mayor Adams, the NYPD, and the OAG also thanks the Organized Retail Crime teams from Macy’s, CVS Pharmacy, Rite-Aid and Lowe’s for their ongoing assistance during this investigation. A special thanks to the Rite Aid Manager of Organized Retail Crime & Special Investigations, John Moore; Macy’s Senior Organized Retail Crime Investigator, Israel Herrera; Lowe’s Regional Investigations Manager, Amanda Hobert; and CVS Health Director, Organized Retail Crime & Corporate Investigations, Ben Dugan.

Mayor Adams, the NYPD, and the OAG thanks the Human Resources Administration (HRA) for their assistance in the welfare fraud portion of this investigation.

The NYPD and OCTF also utilized the investigative resources provided by eBay and PayPal. A special thank you to both eBay and PayPal law enforcement liaisons.