

Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, December 2, 2020

U.S. Law Enforcement Takes Action Against Approximately 2,300 Money Mules In Global Crackdown On Money Laundering

Department of Justice and Partner Agencies Stop the Flow of Fraud Proceeds

The U.S. Department of Justice, the FBI, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, and six other federal law enforcement agencies announced the completion of the third annual Money Mule Initiative, a coordinated operation to disrupt the networks through which transnational fraudsters move the proceeds of their crimes. Money mules are individuals who assist fraudsters by receiving money from victims of fraud and forwarding it to the fraud organizers, many of whom are located abroad. Some money mules know they are assisting fraudsters, but others are unaware that their actions enable fraudsters' efforts to swindle money from consumers, businesses, and government unemployment funds. Europol announced a simultaneous effort, the [European Money Mule Action \(EMMA\)](#) today.

Over the last two months, U.S. law enforcement agencies took action against over 2,300 money mules, far surpassing [last year's effort](#), which acted against over 600 money mules. This year, actions occurred in every state in the country. The initiative announced today targeted money mules involved in a wide range of schemes including lottery fraud, romance scams, government imposter fraud, technical support fraud, business email compromise or CEO fraud, and unemployment insurance fraud. Many of these schemes target elderly or vulnerable members of society.

"Money mules fuel fraud against some of America's most vulnerable populations. Without the help of these money mules, many foreign fraud enterprises find it difficult to profit off of U.S. victims," said Attorney General William P. Barr. "As this initiative demonstrates, the Department of Justice is committed to disrupting money mule networks, taking actions against more money mules this year than ever before, in an effort to cut off the flow of funds from American consumers and businesses to transnational criminal organizations."

Eight federal law enforcement agencies participated in this year's effort. Led by the Department of Justice's Consumer Protection Branch, the FBI, and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the participating agencies include the Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation Office of Inspector General, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), Social Security Administration Office of Inspector General, U.S. Secret Service, and U.S. Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration.

Some highlights from this year's efforts are:

- Actions were taken to halt the conduct of approximately 2,300 money mules, spanning 92 federal districts.
- Law enforcement served approximately 2,000 money mules with letters warning the money mules that they were facilitating fraud and could face civil or criminal consequences for continuing their actions. Agents conducted over 450 interviews.
- On approximately 30 instances, agents seized assets or facilitated the return of victim funds. Among the asset seizures was a 2019 Lamborghini, which was seized as part of an investigation into a business email compromise scheme.
- The U.S. Postal Inspection Service filed 14 administrative actions requiring money mules to cease facilitating fraud.

- U.S. Attorney's Offices and the Consumer Protection Branch filed 17 civil injunctive actions seeking court orders requiring money mules to stop facilitating fraudulent activity. Districts filing those actions include the Western District of Washington, District of South Carolina, Middle District of Florida, Southern District of Florida, Central District of California, Northern District of New York, and District of Colorado.

Additionally, more than 35 individuals were criminally charged or arrested for their roles in receiving victim payments and forwarding the fraud proceeds to accomplices or laundering fraud proceeds. Cases include:

- The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Central District of California [indicted three individuals](#) for collecting parcels containing victim proceeds in a government imposter scheme.
- The U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Maryland [indicted three individuals](#) for opening bank accounts using falsified documents for the purposes of facilitating a business email compromise scam.
- The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Texas [indicted an individual](#) for facilitating a lottery fraud scheme. The indictment also seeks to forfeit over \$1.2 million.
- The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Ohio [indicted two money mules](#) who facilitated a grandparents scam.
- The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia [charged a money mule](#) who laundered gift cards purchased by fraud victims.

Additional criminal charges were brought by U.S. Attorney's Offices in Southern District of Florida, [Western District of Pennsylvania](#), [Western District of North Carolina](#), Southern District of Texas, the [Southern District of Mississippi](#), and the [District of New Jersey](#).

The above charges are merely allegations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

"The success of the Money Mule Initiative is the culmination of the hard work by and coordination between the FBI and our federal, state, local, and international partners," said FBI Director Christopher Wray. "This campaign has resulted in hundreds of criminal arrests worldwide and justice for countless victims. Today's announcement should send a clear message to those engaged in this type of criminal activity: they are not outside the reach of law enforcement, and the FBI and its partners will relentlessly pursue them in order to protect the American people."

"The Postal Inspection Service has zero tolerance for fraudsters who use the U.S. Mail to transport funds from scammed victims," said Chief Postal Inspector Gary Barksdale. "Postal Inspectors use cutting-edge technology to build strong cases and campaigns like those announced today, which make significant progress towards disrupting money mule networks. Postal Inspectors and our law enforcement partners will be relentless in the pursuit of criminal organizations that perpetrate these schemes."

The agencies participating in the Money Mule Initiative and community partners are undertaking an outreach campaign to increase awareness of how fraudsters use and recruit money mules. U.S. Attorney's Offices across the country, through their Elder Justice Coordinators, will be reaching out to their communities to educate the public about money mules. AmeriCorp Seniors (formerly Senior Corps) will be working to increase awareness of how money mules facilitate fraud and how consumers can avoid unwittingly assisting fraud schemes.

Additionally, the American Bankers Association will be engaging with its members on money mules and the role of financial institutions in addressing the problem. The Department of Justice will also be distributing resources for state and local law enforcement on identifying, disrupting, investigating, and prosecuting money mules.

To find public education materials, as well as information about how fraudsters use and recruit money mules, please visit www.justice.gov/civil/consumer-protection-branch/money-mule-initiative.

Since President Trump signed the bipartisan Elder Abuse Prevention and Prosecution Act (EAPPA) into law, the Department of Justice has participated in hundreds of enforcement actions in criminal and civil cases that targeted or disproportionately affected seniors. In January 2020, the department designated “[Preventing and Disrupting Transnational Elder Fraud](#)” as an Agency Priority Goal, one of its top four priorities. In March 2020, the department [announced](#) the largest elder fraud enforcement action in American history, charging more than 400 defendants in a nationwide elder fraud sweep. The department has also conducted hundreds of trainings and outreach sessions across the country since the passage of the Act.

The department’s extensive efforts to combat elder fraud seek to halt the billions of dollars seniors lose each year to fraud schemes, including those perpetrated by transnational criminal organizations. The best method for prevention, however, is sharing information about the various types of elder fraud schemes with relatives, friends, neighbors, and other seniors who can use that information to protect themselves.

If you or someone you know is age 60 or older and has been a victim of financial fraud, help is standing by at the National Elder Fraud Hotline: 1-833-FRAUD-11 (1-833-372-8311). This U.S. Department of Justice hotline, managed by the Office for Victims of Crime, is staffed by experienced professionals who provide personalized support to callers by assessing the needs of the victim, and identifying relevant next steps. Case managers will identify appropriate reporting agencies, provide information to callers to assist them in reporting, connect callers directly with appropriate agencies, and provide resources and referrals, on a case-by-case basis. Reporting is the first step. Reporting can help authorities identify those who commit fraud and reporting certain financial losses due to fraud as soon as possible can increase the likelihood of recovering losses. The hotline is staffed seven days a week from 6:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. eastern time. English, Spanish and other languages are available.