

NEWS RELEASE

FDLE arrests man in identify theft scheme targeting teachers

One suspect still at large

For Immediate Release

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MIAMI, Fla. - Agents with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Office of Executive Investigations, with the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) and the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, arrested Ralph Alonso Everett Jr. of Miami for organized scheme to defraud, reemployment assistance fraud and criminal use of personal identification. A second man, Isaiah Lewis also of Miami, is at large. The pair is accused of stealing the identities of teachers statewide and using their information to collect unemployment benefits.

The investigation began in 2016, after the DEO's fraud investigation team identified a pattern of suspicious reemployment assistance claims. Losses to the State of Florida are in excess of \$50 thousand.

The investigation identified over 100 employees associated with 65 different school board districts that had their identities illegally used to submit fraudulent reemployment assistance claims from February through December 2016. Although Everett and Lewis attempted to defraud DEO of over \$200 thousand in fraudulent claims, DEO's fraud identification team was able to identify the fraudulent activity which significantly reduced loss to the state.

Investigators believe Everett and Lewis defrauded DEO by filing fraudulent claims utilizing identities of school board employees across the state and several individuals from the healthcare sector. The money was disbursed from DEO into fraudulent bank accounts under the control of Everett and Lewis. The funds were subsequently withdrawn from ATMs throughout Miami.

FDLE Commissioner Rick Swearingen said, "Thanks to the swift, diligent work of the DEO team, FDLE agents and Department of Labor, these criminals were stopped in their tracks and losses to Florida citizens mitigated."

Cissy Proctor, Executive Director of DEO said, "DEO is incredibly thankful for our partnership with FDLE to arrest criminals who steal from Floridians and the Reemployment Assistance Program. Our team is committed to safeguarding taxpayer dollars while providing Floridians a financial bridge to their next job."

Everett was booked into Turner Guilford Knight Correctional Center on \$80,000 bond while Lewis remains at large. Attorney General Pam Bondi's Office of Statewide Prosecution will prosecute the case.

The investigation is on-going and there could be additional arrests.

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