



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Two Postal Service Employees Face Federal Charges of Using Funds from Unemployment Insurance Scheme to Buy Postal Money Orders**

*SANTA ANA, California* – Federal authorities this morning arrested two employees of the U.S. Postal Service who allegedly abused their positions to purchase and cash Postal money orders with tens of thousands of dollars of unemployment benefits fraudulently obtained with false claims of COVID-related job losses.

Christian Jeremyah James, 31, of South Los Angeles, who works in the Culver City Main Post Office, and Armand Caleb Legardy, 32, of Inglewood, who works in the La Tijera Post Office on Crenshaw Boulevard in South Los Angeles, are expected to make their initial court appearances this afternoon in United States District Court in Los Angeles.

A criminal complaint filed on March 3 and unsealed after today's arrests charges James and Legardy with conspiracy, aggravated identity theft, access device fraud, and fraud in connection with major disaster or emergency benefits.

The affidavit in support of the criminal complaint alleges that James and Legardy obtained debit cards issued by the California Employment Development Department (EDD), which administers the state's unemployment insurance program. Those debit cards were issued based on applications for pandemic-related unemployment benefits submitted under 10 stolen identities.

Both James and Legardy used the fraudulently obtained EDD debit cards to purchase Postal money orders and cash Postal money orders that had been purchased with those debit cards, according to the complaint, which notes instances in which unidentified individuals used the EDD debit cards to purchase Postal money orders from the defendants while they were on duty at the Post Office.

James and Legardy also allegedly used the EDD debit cards issued in other people's names to withdraw thousands of dollars in cash from ATMs. And, according to the complaint, James and Legardy deposited multiple fraudulently purchased Postal money orders directly into their own bank accounts, including one instance in which

James purchased a \$1,000 money order that was then deposited into Legardy's bank account. According to the complaint, more than \$25,000 in fraudulently purchased Postal money orders were deposited into James' own bank account.

As of late December, the 10 fraudulently obtained EDD debit cards had been used to make \$168,758 in purchases and \$31,133 in ATM cash withdrawals.

The complaint does not accuse James or Legardy of submitting the fraudulent applications to the EDD.

*A criminal complaint contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.*

If they were to be convicted of the conspiracy and two fraud offenses alleged in the complaint, James and Legardy would each face a statutory maximum sentence of 45 years in federal prison. The charge of aggravated identity theft carries a mandatory two-year prison sentence that would run consecutively to any other prison term imposed in the case.

This matter is being investigated by the United States Postal Service – Office of Inspector General, the U.S Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General, IRS Criminal Investigation, and the California Employment Development Department.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Charles Pell of the Santa Ana Branch Office.

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