



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY COUNTY OF KERN

CIVIC CENTER JUSTICE BUILDING
1215 TRUXTUN AVENUE
BAKERSFIELD, CALIFORNIA 93301
(661) 868-2340, FAX: (661) 868-2700

ANDREA S. KOHLER
ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY

JOSEPH A. KINZEL
ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY

CYNTHIA J. ZIMMER
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

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MEDIA ADVISORY

CONTACT:
Daniela Gonzaga
(661) 868-2381

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DA Investigators and Partnering Agencies Conduct Successful Skimming Operation

(Bakersfield) - On November 1, 2024, the Kern County District Attorney's Office, Bakersfield Police Department, Department of Homeland Security (HSI), California Department of Social Services EBT Fraud and Theft Detection Unit, and the Kern County Sheriff's Office conducted a sting operation targeting individuals using skimming devices and fraudulent EBT cards to conduct fraudulent ATM withdrawals in the Bakersfield area. The operation resulted in three arrests which included 58 felony and misdemeanor charges of money laundering, grand theft, conspiracy, identity theft, fraudulent use of a credit card, and fraud using scanning devices. Investigators seized cash totaling \$15,702, 48 fraudulent credit cards, burglary tools, and devices used to defraud victims. The suspects arrested during the operation were 25-year-old Mari-Mar Milica, 22-year-old Fernando Stantu, and 24-year-old Alberto-Ionel Baran.



Kern County has seen an increase in skimming over the past year, particularly targeting EBT cards. In October of 2024, the Department of Social Services Skims and Analysis report showed that there was over \$875,000 in stolen benefits in Kern County. Criminals steal EBT and other payment card numbers by installing illegal skimming devices on ATM's, gas pumps and merchant sale terminals. The skimming devices are then used to capture card information from EBT cards and encode that data onto other cards with magnetic strips, such as gift cards and hotel keys. EBT fraud targets the most vulnerable members of our community because they are low-income households that are being deprived of government assistance intended to help families pay for food and other basic items.

District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer commented; "It's troubling that criminals are exploiting both taxpayer resources and essential government assistance for their own personal gain. This behavior is not only

unethical—it's a serious crime. I am proud of the collaboration between our office and our law enforcement partners, who have worked tirelessly to bring this scheme to light and protect our community."

