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District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer Warns of Legal Consequences for EBT Fraud and Provides Resources for Victims

(Bakersfield) – Kern County District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer is issuing a strong warning to criminals engaging in Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) fraud, emphasizing the severe legal consequences of these crimes. Our office has been made aware of individuals using skimming devices and fraudulent EBT cards to conduct fraudulent ATM withdrawals in Kern County. Since then, we have worked closely with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and Kern County Department of Human Services (DHS) to combat this criminal activity in the community.

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.

The CDSS Skims and Analysis Report has reported the following loss in Kern County:

- July 2024 - \$614,322.75
- Aug 2024- \$329,670.10
- Sept. 2024- \$664,844.69
- Oct. 2024- \$386,561
- Nov. 2024- \$121,276
- Dec. 2024- \$232, 972
- Jan. 2025- \$199,755

The District Attorney's Office has conducted significant operations to combat this crime. On November 1, 2024, District Attorney investigators seized cash totaling \$15,702, 48 fraudulent credit cards, burglary tools, and devices used to defraud victims. The suspects arrested and charged were Mari-Mar Milica, Fernando Stantu, and Alberto-Ionel Baran (BF201846A-C). On December 2, 2024, Investigators were monitoring EBT activity in the South Bakersfield area and identified a subject fraudulently withdrawing

funds from an ATM. Investigators immediately responded to the area and seized 78 cloned EBT cards and cash totaling \$63,952. Norbert Karaba was arrested and charged in case BF202622A.

District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer commented; “EBT fraud is not a victimless crime - it directly harms vulnerable families, children, and individuals who rely on these benefits to meet their basic needs. The District Attorney’s Office will not tolerate those who exploit the system for personal gain. We are aggressively investigating, identifying, and prosecuting offenders to protect our community and hold criminals accountable.”

DHS suggests the following precautions to keep your card safe:

- Report a theft to DHS [in person](#), online through users’ [BenefitsCal.com](#) account, or through the EBT helpline at 877-328-9677. There are several factors that are taken into consideration, based on the regulations regarding whether the replacement can be made, but if eligible, a replacement card will be issued to the customer within 10 business days. DHS is working through every request as expeditiously as possible.
- Download and use the ebtEDGE Mobile Application as a method to better manage benefits and reset your pin number frequently.