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Judge Finds Baran Guilty of EBT Benefits Fraud Related Charges
People v. Alberto Ionel Baran: Kern County Superior Court BF201846C

(Bakersfield) - Kern County District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer announced a conviction in a case that involved EBT benefits fraud. On May 5, 2025, the Honorable Kern County Superior Court Judge Gloria Cannon allowed defendant Alberto Ionel Baran to plea no contest to all charges and enhancements in exchange for a court-indicated sentence. Although the charges carry a potential sentence of up to 10 years and 8 months in state prison, the judge has preliminarily indicated a sentence of 2 years. However, the District Attorney's Office retains the right to argue at sentencing that this indicated term is inadequate. If the court agrees and decides to impose a harsher sentence, Baran may be allowed to withdraw his plea or accept the new sentence, even if it differs from the originally indicated term.

Baran admitted guilt to numerous felony and misdemeanor charges. He admitted to two counts of grand theft of property and one count each of grand theft of access cards for fraudulent use, forgery of access cards, fraudulent use of access cards, money laundering, unauthorized use of identifying information, and conspiracy to commit a felony. Additionally, Baran admitted guilt to one misdemeanor count of fraudulent possession of a scanning device. He also admitted the enhancements alleged, specifically two felony takings over \$100,000 and a plan involving sophistication. The case was prosecuted by Deputy District Attorney Anthony Yim.

On November 1, 2024, Kern County District Attorney (KCDA) Investigators uncovered that Baran had stolen over \$100,000 worth of Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) benefits. These benefits include CalFresh, CalWORKs, and other program benefits, more commonly known as welfare assistance. Investigation revealed that Baran visited Kern County on six different days between September 1, 2024 through his arrest on November 1, 2024. His visits were to illegally access EBT accounts that were previously obtained using illegal skimmers located in Kern County. KCDA Investigators uncovered evidence that Baran was in possession of 175 EBT fraudulent access cards that contained a total of \$121,511 in benefits.

Baran is not the first individual identified by the Kern County District Attorney's (KCDA) Office in connection with EBT fraud as our office has recognized the pressing need to address this issue within our

community. Traditionally, such investigations fall within the scope of the California Department of Social Services (CDSS). However, acknowledging the significant impact of EBT fraud on local residents, the KCDA Office proactively initiated its own investigations into these crimes – collaborating with CDSS to gain access to investigative tools and training to effectively combat this form of fraud.

Consequently, the KCDA Office has committed substantial resources to ensure that offenders are held accountable. In the case of Baran, our office objected to the leniency of the 2 year indicated sentence, advocating for a more appropriate penalty that reflects the severity of his crimes. Based upon the large number of victims affected (175), and the large amount at issue (\$121,511), our office argued to the Court that Baran deserved a more responsible sentence to match the impact of his crimes.

District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer commented; “Baran’s crimes affected some of the most vulnerable people in Kern County, those who rely on welfare assistance to feed their families. A two-year indicated sentence fails to reflect the severity and widespread impact of these offenses. We remain committed to seeking justice for the hundreds of victims affected and will continue to advocate for a sentence that matches the gravity of the crime.”

Sentencing is set for June 3, 2025, in Department 13 of the Kern County Superior Court before the Honorable Judge Gloria Cannon. A warrant for arrest is still outstanding for Baran’s co-defendants, Fernando Stanciu and Mari Mar Mirica.

Alberto Ionel Baran:

