



U. S. Department of Justice

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**TRIO SENTENCED TO FEDERAL PRISON FOR CONSPIRACY,
IDENTITY THEFT, AND VARIOUS FRAUD CHARGES, INCLUDING
A STOLEN COVID-19 STIMULUS CHECK**

TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA – Jason R. Coody, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Florida announced the sentencing of Joe Nicholas Catala, 21, of Port St. Lucie, Florida (formerly of Tallahassee, Florida); Nicholas Carl Ramirez, 20, of Port St. Lucie, Florida (formerly of Tallahassee, Florida); and Clonet Junior Charmant, 21, of Port St. Lucie. Catala was sentenced to a total of thirty-six months in prison, Ramirez was sentenced to a total of two months in prison, and Charmant was sentenced to a total of 26 months in prison. All defendants were ordered to pay restitution to financial institutions and individuals.

The sentences imposed were the result of guilty pleas which were entered in November 2021, when all three defendants pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit bank and wire fraud, bank fraud, and aggravated identity theft. Catala also pleaded guilty to passing or uttering a Treasury check bearing a false or forged endorsement. Charmant also pleaded guilty to identity fraud.

“Identity thieves would rather steal the personal identifying information of hardworking citizens than earn an honest living,” said U.S. Attorney Coody. “Thanks to the dedication of our law enforcement partners, these criminals will have steady employment cleaning the toilets and dormitories of a Bureau of Prisons facility for some time; a task that hopefully will deter them from future criminal conduct upon release.”

Court documents reflect that between April 1, 2019, and May 2, 2020, Catala, Ramirez, and Charmant unlawfully obtained and shared with each other and others the credit and debit card numbers, bank account numbers, and personal identifying information of third parties without authorization. Further, the defendants communicated with each other and others about how their scheme would be executed and how they would share the proceeds. The trio then fraudulently transferred funds from accounts belonging to customers of financial institutions into their own accounts using Zelle and the Internet. Additionally, the defendants used the proceeds of their scheme to purchase merchandise and services from merchants and restaurants, and to make cash withdrawals at automated teller machines (“ATMs”).

Further, Catala fraudulently used the names, addresses, and debit card numbers of others to purchase theme park admissions tickets. Catala also fraudulently used the name, social security number, and date of birth of the previous tenant of his Tallahassee apartment in a false application to open a bank account. Catala used the falsely opened bank account to deposit the proceeds of the previous tenant's Economic Impact Payment ("EIP") check, also known as a "Coronavirus Stimulus Check," which was mailed to Catala's apartment. Catala deposited the EIP check knowing that it had a forged endorsement, and then electronically transferred some of the proceeds to Charmant via Zelle.

"The Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration continues to aggressively pursue those who attempt to corruptly interfere with Federal tax administration, including those who fraudulently obtain Economic Impact Payments through the Coronavirus, Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act which were intended for Americans to assist them through the pandemic," said J. Russell George, Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration. "We appreciate the work of the U.S. Attorney's Office, and our law enforcement partners to ensure this criminal activity is held to account."

Catala's imprisonment will be followed by five years of supervised release. Ramirez's and Charmant's imprisonment will both be followed by three years of supervised release. All three defendants were ordered to pay restitution to financial institutions and individuals. As part of the sentences imposed, the Court also ordered the forfeiture of the defendants' cell phones, computers, U.S. currency, an Xbox gaming system, and various debit/credit/gift cards.

"U.S. Postal Inspectors are committed to protecting the nations mail system and our customers from crimes involving the mail," said Joseph Cronin, Inspector in Charge, United States Postal Inspection Service - Miami Division.

This case was jointly investigated by the United States Postal Inspection Service, the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration, and the Tallahassee Police Department. Assistant United States Attorney Justin M. Keen prosecuted the case.

Anyone with information about allegations of attempted fraud involving COVID-19 can report it by calling the Department of Justice's National Center for Disaster Fraud Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

The United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Florida is one of 94 offices that serve as the nation's principal litigators under the direction of the Attorney General. To access public court documents online, please visit the [U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida](https://www.uscourts.gov/court-locations/northern-district-of-florida) website. For more information about the United States Attorney's Office, Northern District of Florida, visit <http://www.justice.gov/usao/fln/index.html>.

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