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**AFFIDAVIT OF BRENDAN J. CULLEN  
IN SUPPORT OF APPLICATION FOR A COMPLAINT AND ARREST WARRANT  
AND FOR SEARCH WARRANTS**

I, Brendan J. Cullen, state:

**INTRODUCTION AND AGENT BACKGROUND**

1. I am a Special Agent with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) assigned to the Providence Field Office. I have been employed by HSI and its predecessor, the U.S. Customs Service since January of 2003. In connection with my official duties, I have investigated and assisted other agents in investigating numerous cases involving a wide variety of criminal violations including, but not limited to, narcotics trafficking, money laundering, illegal importation of goods, fraud, intellectual property rights, and interstate transportation of stolen property.

2. The facts in this affidavit come from my personal observations, my training and experience, and information obtained from other agents and witnesses. This affidavit is intended to show merely that there is sufficient probable cause for the requested warrants and does not set forth all of my knowledge about this matter.

3. This affidavit is submitted in support of:

- a. a criminal complaint and arrest warrant for Jirui LIU (“LIU”), YOB 2001, address XX Grenbeck Drive, Scarborough, Ontario, Canada.
- b. pursuant to Rule 41 of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure, search warrants for
  - i. an Apple iPhone with a black colored backing recovered from Jirui LIU on September 25, 2024 (“the Target Cell Phone 1”), described in more detail in Attachment A-1, incorporated by reference as if set forth in full, for the items described in Attachment B.
  - ii. an Apple iPhone with a blue colored backing in a clear plastic case recovered from Jirui LIU on September 25, 2024 (“the Target Cell Phone 2”), described in more detail in Attachment A-2, incorporated by reference as if set forth in full, for the items described in Attachment B.

- iii. an Apple Series 10 black colored Smartwatch<sup>1</sup> recovered from Jirui LIU on September 25, 2024 (“the Target Watch 1”), described in more detail in Attachment A-3, in incorporated by reference as if set forth in full, for the items described in Attachment B.

hereinafter collectively described as the “Target Cell Phones” and/or “Target Devices.”

- 4. As will be shown below, there is probable cause to believe that:
  - a. beginning on an unknown date, but not later than on or about August 1, 2024 and continuing through on or about September 25, 2024, Jirui LIU did knowingly commit the following violations of federal law: Conspiracy to Commit Wire Fraud in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1349, Wire Fraud in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1343, Money Laundering in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1956, and Conspiracy to Engage in Money Laundering, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1956(h) (“Specified Federal Offenses”), and
  - b. evidence, fruits, and instrumentalities of the Specified Federal Offenses will be found on the Target Devices.

#### **PROBABLE CAUSE**

5. I am currently investigating a number of reports to law enforcement involving individuals, often elderly individuals (“victim(s)”), being induced to provide cash and/or gold bars to unknown individuals after making contact with those unknown individuals online. As summarized in examples described herein, from my investigation, I have learned that victims are being contacted by unknown individuals after the victim clicks on a pop-up or responds to a message or prompt on his or her computer. The victims thereafter begin communications with unknown individuals who, through false statements, request and/or convince the victim(s) to provide cash and/or gold to individuals who are sent to the victim(s) to retrieve the cash and/or gold.

6. On September 17, 2024, I became aware of a financial fraud investigation being conducted by Narragansett Police Department (NPD). On this same date, NPD Detective Erik

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<sup>1</sup> I am aware from speaking with Certified Computer Forensic Special Agent, that it may be possible for LIU to access and alter data stored in his other seized devices from this Apple smartwatch.

Thompson shared a copy of a NPD police report documenting their investigation into the financial exploitation of an elderly resident of Narragansett. According to the NPD report, on September 9, 2024, a 79-year-old victim, hereinafter referenced by his initials J.F., arrived at the NPD and reported that he fell victim to a scam. J.F. reported that he received an alert on his computer that he was under investigation for attempting to purchase child pornography. J.F. reported that this computer alert provided a phone number for him to contact about this matter.

7. J.F. reported that he contacted the phone number provided and was advised by an unknown individual that as a result of his actions, the government was attempting to garnish his assets. J.F. also reported that the unidentified caller also explained to him that his social security number had been compromised and his identity was connected to money laundering activity. J.F. reported that he spoke with multiple unidentified callers who instructed him to withdraw funds from his bank accounts and turn over these assets to members of the government who could secure his funds for him during their investigation.

8. According to the NPD police report, J.F. stated that, as a result of this scam, in early September of 2024, as directed by the unidentified callers, he withdrew \$35,000 from his Citizens Bank account and turned this cash over to an unidentified Asian male who came to his residence in Narragansett. J.F. also reported that several days after turning over this cash, as directed by the unidentified callers, he purchased \$130,000 in gold from a Rhode Island pawn shop/precious metals dealer. J.F. turned over this gold to another Asian male who also came to his residence.<sup>2</sup>

9. On September 18, 2024, I conducted an interview with J.F. at the NPD. During this interview, which was audio recorded, J.F. provided the following information (not verbatim):

- J.F. stated that in August 2024, while attempting to make an online purchase on Amazon, he observed a graphic on his screen warning him about a violation and providing a phone number to contact. J.F. contacted this number and spoke with an individual

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<sup>2</sup> J.F. reported to NPD that between September 4-7, 2024, he ordered and purchased this gold from a Rhode Island precious metals dealer and then turned this gold over to the second Asian male at his residence.

- who claimed to work for “Apple Care.”<sup>3</sup> This individual informed J.F. that he knows that J.F. made a \$15,000 purchase of child pornography. This individual further informed J.F. that he was going to put him in touch with Citizens Bank fraud unit.
- J.F. stated that he was put in contact with an individual who identified himself as “Ryan Wilson” from Citizen Bank. Wilson informed J.F. that his social security number was compromised and used to conduct money laundering and other illegal activity. The representative purporting to be from Citizens Bank informed J.F. that the Treasury Department was going to have to cancel his social security number and issue him a new one. In the meantime, the caller stated that Citizens Bank was going to secure his funds.
  - J.F. stated that the first phone call with Ryan Wilson lasted from 9:30 AM to 4:30 PM, because Wilson told J.F. that he had to keep a secure line established. During the time of the call, Wilson instructed J.F. to visit various Bitcoin ATMs in the Narragansett area to deposit cash. J.F. stated that he was unable to complete these transactions.
  - J.F. stated that Wilson maintained communications with him and told him that someone would be coming to his home to retrieve cash. J.F. withdrew approximately \$30,000<sup>4</sup> in cash and an Asian male came to his home on a scooter to retrieve the funds.
  - After this transaction, Wilson informed J.F. that they needed gold. Wilson stated that the Treasury Department preferred to deal in gold. The caller identified a Rhode Island gold dealer and instructed J.F. to make a \$130,000 purchase in gold. J.F. stated that he made this purchase from this gold dealer in Rhode Island.
  - J.F. stated that several individuals at his bank and the convenience store where he initially attempted to conduct Bitcoin ATM transactions asked if he was being scammed. However, the callers with whom he was dealing instructed J.F. not to talk

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<sup>3</sup> J.F. identified three phone numbers that were used to contact him as part of this scam. This investigation has revealed that all three phone numbers are administered by Google Voice, a voice over the internet phone service.

<sup>4</sup> During his initial report with NPD, J.F. reported initially turning over \$35,000 in cash as a result of this scam. However, during my interview of J.F., stated that he initially lost \$30,000 in cash.

- to anyone about what was going on.
- J.F. stated that another Asian male came to his residence to retrieve the gold. J.F. stated that he was instructed to provide a password of “moon” to the individual who came to retrieve the gold from him.
  - Following this transaction, the callers wanted another transaction. J.F. stated that he has been in regular contact with the individuals, including Wilson and another individual who claimed to be from the Treasury Department named “Eric Wardell”.
  - At one point, the callers informed J.F. that they would leave him with \$17,000 to allow him to pay bills.
  - J.F. stated that when he visited Citizens Bank and informed personnel about what was happening, they told him that he was being scammed.
  - J.F. stated that he has had contact with a third individual related to this scam named “James Parker”. J.F. believed that Parker was involved in technical support issues and instructed J.F. to update his iPad.
  - J.F. said that the individuals with whom he has been in contact are waiting for an additional \$160,000 in gold bars, because they know that J.F. has these funds in an account. J.F. was instructed to use these funds to purchase gold. Wilson instructed J.F. to wire the funds from his Citizens Bank account to the gold dealer.

10. During his interview, J.F. agreed to maintain contact with law enforcement and provide updates about his contact with the callers in anticipation of possible law enforcement action in the near future. J.F. has since reported that he has remained in contact with Wilson. J.F. stated that he and Wilson have continued to discuss plans for J.F. to purchase the \$160,000 in gold and pick up this gold at the Rhode Island gold dealer on the morning of September 25, 2024.

11. On September 24, 2024, J.F. reported to NPD that Wilson instructed J.F. to send him a text message once he picks up the gold and to call Wilson once he arrives home with the gold. J.F. stated that as he made arrangements with Wilson, Wilson questioned why J.F. was picking up gold from the gold dealer on Wednesday. Wilson informed J.F. that he checked and discovered that the dealer was closed on Wednesdays and wanted to ensure that J.F. would still be able to retrieve the gold. J.F. stated to NPD that assured Wilson that the owner of the gold

dealer informed him that he would be at the shop on Wednesday and would have the gold available.

12. On September 25, 2024, Detective Thompson and HSI Task Force Office (TFO) Jared Johansen met with J.F. at his residence in Narragansett.<sup>5</sup> At approximately 10:27 AM, J.F. sent a text message to Wilson, stating that he was going to the gold dealer and would contact Wilson once he was back home. Wilson responded by text message asking J.F. to let him know once he was back home. After that text exchange, at the direction of law enforcement, J.F. departed his residence; drove to the gold dealer, and; entered the gold dealer/pawn shop. Thereafter, J.F. departed the gold dealer holding a box and returned to his residence..<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> With J.F.'s concurrence, Detective Thompson and TFO Johansen remained at J.F. residence to provide protection and investigative oversight throughout the day on September 25, 2024.

<sup>6</sup> *Agent's Note:* During this investigation, NPD Detective Thompson contacted a Rhode Island gold dealer Rhode Island regarding the fraud perpetrated against J.F. The owner of the gold dealer agreed to assist law enforcement as needed. On September 24, 2024, the owner of the gold dealer created a fictitious receipt documenting the sale of \$160,000 worth of gold to J.F. to be used in furtherance of this investigation. On September 25, 2024, the owner of the gold dealer agreed to meet J.F. at his business and provide a box to J.F. to maintain the appearance that J.F. successfully completed a transaction at the business.

13. On September 25, 2024, as part of this investigation, law enforcement provided J.F. with two silver bars coated in a gold exterior to give the appearance of genuine gold. These bars were provided to J.F. in an effort to convince Wilson and other co-conspirators that J.F. was in possession of genuine gold bars. Photos of the bars are shown below:



14. According to Detective Thompson and TFO Johansen, soon after J.F. returned to his residence, he called Wilson and informed him that he had the gold. Wilson requested that J.F. send him a photograph of the gold and the receipt. J.F. ended the phone call, took a photograph of the sham gold bars provided to him by law enforcement and a photograph of the receipt for the purchase of two gold bars from the Rhode Island gold dealer and texted these photos to Wilson. J.F. then called Wilson again. According to TFO Johansen, Wilson informed

J.F. over the phone that he was going to contact the government agents and find someone to come to J.F.'s residence.

15. According to TFO Johansen, Wilson instructed J.F. to remain on the line with him beginning just before 11:00 AM. Wilson and J.F. remained on an open line. However, according to TFO Johansen, for most of the time while the two were engaged on the call, neither spoke to one another. J.F. informed TFO Johansen that this open line with little communication was consistent with the previous occasions when Wilson arranged for the pickup of cash and gold from J.F. At approximately 11:45 AM, Wilson informed J.F. that someone would arrive at J.F.'s residence at 2:30 PM. At approximately 2:18 PM, according to TFO Johansen, Wilson provided J.F. with a password of "moon" and asked for J.F.'s clothing description. At approximately 2:30 PM, according to TFO Johansen, Wilson told J.F. that the person coming to J.F.'s residence was 30 minutes away. At approximately 3:00 PM, Wilson asked J.F. for specifics on how the gold was packaged.

16. At approximately 2:59 PM, TFO Thulier observed a black Mercedes SUV bearing New Jersey license plates come off of Route 1 onto Point Judith Road in Narragansett. SA Brendan Jaffee observed that the driver of this vehicle, an Asian male, was on the phone as he traveled southbound on Point Judith Road. This Mercedes was then observed passing the road towards J.F.'s residence, conducting a U-turn, and heading back in the direction on J.F.'s road. This Mercedes was then observed driving down J.F.'s street, where he passed J.F.'s residence and backed into a parking spot at the end of J.F.'s street.

17. At approximately 3:05 PM, while this Mercedes was parked a short distance from J.F.'s residence, Wilson instructed J.F. to send another photo of the gold and told him to attempt to hide the gold in the packaging. Wilson informed J.F. that he did not want the courier to see it. Wilson also asked J.F. to send him another photo of the gold and to tape the box shut.

18. The Mercedes Benz then slowly moved from the end of J.F.'s street to a parking spot located across from J.F.'s residence. The Mercedes Benz was then observed moving again and pulling across the street into a parking spot in front on J.F.'s residence. Law enforcement observed that the license plate for his Mercedes Benz was H28SXR. This New Jersey registration belongs to a business named "Fancy Carp Inc." of Scotch Plains, NJ.

19. At approximately 3:10 PM, an Asian male exited the driver's side of the Mercedes Benz and approached J.F.'s front door. J.F. remained on the phone with Wilson.



According to TFO Johansen, J.F. gave this Asian male the password of “moon” and thanked him. The Asian male, who was wearing a black-colored baseball cap, a dark sweatshirt, and grey sweatpants, could be seen carrying the bag containing the sham gold down the steps and to the Mercedes Benz. The Asian male got into the Mercedes Benz with the bag and departed the area. J.F. informed TFO Johansen that the Asian male did not look inside of the bag.

20. Law enforcement began to follow this Mercedes Benz northbound on Point Judith Road. Surveillance of the Mercedes Benz continued from Narragansett to Route 95 Southbound into Connecticut. While traveling on Route 95 Southbound in Connecticut, I made contact with Connecticut State Police Troop F, located in Westbrook, CT and spoke with Trooper Dale DeGaetano (Badge #345) and requested assistance in conducting a vehicle stop on the Mercedes Benz. At approximately 4:15 PM, I observed Trooper DeGaetano pull up near the black Mercedes Benz as it approached Exit 64 in Westbrook, CT. At this time, I observed the black Mercedes Benz suddenly change lanes and quickly pull off of the highway onto the off ramp for Exit 64. Trooper DeGaetano engaged his emergency lights and pulled over the Mercedes Benz on the off-ramp. Trooper DeGaetano asked the driver of the vehicle to step out of the car and placed him in handcuffs. I observed through the driver side door that there were two cell phones located in the center console area of the vehicle. I also observed the bag containing the sham gold located on the floorboard of the front passenger side of the vehicle.

As shown below, the bag was opened. However, the box containing the sham gold was closed.



21. I asked the driver for his identification, and he told me that I could retrieve his wallet from his pants' pocket.<sup>7</sup> This wallet contained a Canadian passport and Ontario Driver's License in the name of Jirui LIU. LIU stated that the vehicle he was driving was a rental vehicle. (*Agent's Note:* LIU later informed me that he spends \$2500 per month to rent this Mercedes Benz.)

22. I asked LIU to sit in TFO Kurt Ripke's vehicle. LIU communicated with me in English but stated that he speaks Mandarin. At approximately 4:30 PM, I contacted a Mandarin

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<sup>7</sup> The Target Watch 1 was also located in LIU's pants pocket.

interpreter via telephone as I sat in TFO Ripke's vehicle with LIU. Using the assistance of the Mandarin translator, I read LIU his Miranda rights. In addition to the Mandarin interpreter, I also provided LIU with a written copy of his Miranda rights in Chinese. LIU stated that he understood these rights, which he voluntarily waived and signed a Miranda waiver form.

23. During the interview of LIU, which was audio recorded, I advised him that he was under arrest and informed him that I would be seeking a search warrant for his vehicle. I asked LIU if he would be willing to grant consent to law enforcement to search his vehicle. LIU stated that whatever option would be quicker. I asked LIU if I could retrieve his phones from his vehicle, to which he consented. LIU stated that he has two phones, one black and one blue (Target Cell Phone 1 and 2).

24. LIU stated that he lives in Canada and was in the United States visiting friends and playing poker. LIU stated that he played poker in Las Vegas and Los Angeles. LIU stated that he had been in the United States for almost three months. LIU stated that he was currently staying in New York but also stayed in Los Angeles. When I asked LIU what he was doing in this area, he stated that he was taking "some stuff". When asked what stuff, LIU stated that he did not know. He was just going to take stuff back to New York. LIU stated that he was doing this for a Chinese guy that he knows from a game called "League of Legends". LIU did not know this individual's name but only knew this person's Chinese name (username) listed in the game (League of Legends). LIU wrote this individual's name using a Chinese character followed by the English language letters "UZI". LIU stated that only spoke with this individual over a microphone on the game platform of League of Legends. LIU stated that he has never met this individual in person.

25. LIU reiterated that this individual asked him to pick up some stuff and come back to New York. LIU reiterated that he did not know what he was supposed to pick up. LIU stated that he asked this individual if it was drugs that he was picking up, and the person told him that it was not drugs. LIU stated that this individual was going to pay him \$500 to make this trip and pick up this item. LIU stated that he was supposed to bring what he picked up to a park in New York. LIU could not identify where this park was located. LIU stated that was supposed to remember where this park was located but couldn't recall. When showed a map of New York, LIU pointed to the area of Harrison, New York and stated that the park may have been in that area. LIU could not recall an exit number or name of the area where this park was located. LIU

stated that he may have to go back to his home in New York and contact the person over the game. LIU stated that he had not been paid yet for this trip and but believed that he was going to be paid over the WeChat<sup>8</sup> or Ali<sup>9</sup> pay platforms.

26. LIU stated that he did not know the individual who gave him the box. LIU stated that he opened the bag but did not open the box/package located inside of the bag. When I asked LIU again if LIU was going to meet with someone at the park, he said no. LIU then stated that he wished to speak with an attorney. At this point, I concluded the interview.

27. TFO Ripke and I then transported LIU back to Rhode Island, after I had been advised that the Honorable Lincoln D. Almond had authorized that he be held.

28. U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) records checks for LIU shows two trips to the United States from Canada in 2024, including his last entry on July 1, 2024.

#### **TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE WITH FINANCIAL FRAUD INVESTIGATIONS**

29. Based on my training and experience, I know that individuals and criminal organizations engaged in illicit fraud and money laundering activities utilize a variety of methods to conceal and disguise the true nature and source of the funds. I know these methods are designed in part to deter law enforcement and regulators from tracing the origin of the funds and thereby discovering the underlining criminal activity. I also know from my training and experience that criminal organizations engaged in internet-based fraud schemes often utilize networks of individuals in the United States, and use cell phones and other digital devices to communicate.

30. I know from my training and experience that individuals involved in fraud and money laundering activities attempt to conceal their involvement in the underlining criminal activity in a variety of ways. In doing so, they may engage in financial transactions that are designed to hide the true nature and source of the funds and the individual's involvement. In this investigation, I believe that the request to the victim to purchase gold bars was an effort to conceal the source of the funds.

31. Based on my training and experience, I know that individuals engaged in wire fraud and money laundering activities, often maintain records for extended periods of time,

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<sup>8</sup> WeChat is a China-based social media and messaging application that also operates a digital payment platform.

<sup>9</sup> Alipay is a China-based mobile payment platform.

particularly when they are involved in ongoing criminal conduct. Records are commonly maintained digitally, via the use of cellular phone and those records can be stored on said devices indefinitely. For documents, images, and videos delivered electronically, person may also be under the mistaken belief that they have deleted, hidden or further destroyed any digital evidence that could be retrieved by a trained forensic computer expert.

32. I also know that wire fraud and money laundering suspects frequently take or cause to be taken photographs and/or videos of themselves, their associates, and illicit proceeds. These wire fraud suspects often maintain these photographs and/or videos in their electronic devices.

### **TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE ON DIGITAL DEVICES**

33. Based on my training, experience, and information from those involved in the forensic examination of digital devices, I know that the following electronic evidence, inter alia, is often retrievable from digital devices:

- a. Forensic methods may uncover electronic files or remnants of such files months or even years after the files have been downloaded, deleted, or viewed via the Internet. Normally, when a person deletes a file on a computer, the data contained in the file does not disappear; rather, the data remain on the hard drive until overwritten by new data, which may only occur after a long period of time. Similarly, files viewed on the Internet are often automatically downloaded into a temporary directory or cache that are only overwritten as they are replaced with more recently downloaded or viewed content and may also be recoverable months or years later.
- b. Digital devices often contain electronic evidence related to a crime, the device's user, or the existence of evidence in other locations, such as, how the device has been used, what it has been used for, who has used it, and who has been responsible for creating or maintaining records, documents, programs, applications, and materials on the device. That evidence is often stored in logs and other artifacts that are not kept in places where the user stores files, and in places where the user may be unaware of them. For example, recoverable data can include evidence of deleted or edited files; recently used tasks and processes; online nicknames and

passwords in the form of configuration data stored by browser, e-mail, and chat programs; attachment of other devices; times the device was in use; and file creation dates and sequence.

- c. The absence of data on a digital device may be evidence of how the device was used, what it was used for, and who used it. For example, showing the absence of certain software on a device may be necessary to rebut a claim that the device was being controlled remotely by such software.
- d. Digital device users can also attempt to conceal data by using encryption, steganography, or by using misleading filenames and extensions. Digital devices may also contain “booby traps” that destroy or alter data if certain procedures are not scrupulously followed. Law enforcement continuously develops and acquires new methods of decryption, even for devices or data that cannot currently be decrypted.
- e. Based on my training and experience, research of smartwatches, to include Apple smartwatches, and the facts set forth herein, I know that the smartwatches may have capabilities that allow it to be connected and synched to a smartphone. These capabilities include GPS for tracking a user’s location as well as tracking certain patterns of health activity. I am also aware that smartwatches, including Apple smartwatches, allow users to receive notifications, install various applications, and sync these applications with their Apple phones. Certain Apple smartwatches also allow users to access the internet, make and receive phone calls, and take photos directly from the watch. In my training and experience, examining data stored on devices of this type can uncover, among other things, evidence that reveals or suggests who possessed or used the device and where the device was located.

**CONCLUSION**

34. I therefore submit that there is probable cause to believe that beginning on an unknown date but not later than August 1, 2024 and continuing through on or about September 21, 2024, in the District of Rhode Island and elsewhere, defendant JIRUI LIU did knowingly commit the Specified Federal Offenses, and that evidence, fruits, and instrumentalities of such the Specified Federal Offenses will be found on the Target Devices.

Respectfully submitted,




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BRENDAN J. CULLEN  
Special Agent  
Homeland Security Investigations

Attested to by the applicant in accordance with the requirements of Fed. R. Crim. P. 4.1. by: **Telephone** (specify reliable electronic means)

\_\_\_\_\_  
September 26, 2024  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Providence RI**  
City and State

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Judge's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Lincoln D Almond USMJ**  
Printed Name and Title