



SOMERSET COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

**DECEMBER 8, 2010
NEWS RELEASES**

SOMERSET COUNTY JURY RETURNS GUILTY VERDICTS IN INTERSTATE RACKETEERING, MONEY LAUNDERING AND CONSPIRACY CASE

“OPERATION STOP PAYMENT”

Somerville – Somerset County Prosecutor Geoffrey D. Soriano announces that a Somerset County Jury has returned guilty verdicts as to all five defendants who proceeded to trial as a result of a 407 Count Indictment originally charging fifteen defendants in an interstate Racketeering, Money Laundering and Conspiracy case. The underlying investigation, code-named “Operation Stop Payment”, focused primarily on identifying the number of defendants involved in this criminal enterprise; identifying any individuals, financial institutions or other business and government entities that were victimized by this criminal enterprise; and stopping the payment on fictitious payroll checks that were manufactured by this criminal enterprise on an almost daily basis.

Prosecutor Soriano said defendant Eric Eugene Criss, a/k/a Tariq Samaad, of South Orange, was found guilty of seven (7) second degree crimes including Racketeering, Leader of Organized Crime, Money Laundering, Manufacturing False Government Documents, Transferring False Government Documents, Conspiracy to Transfer False Government Documents, and Conspiracy to Commit Theft by Deception as well as Possession of a False Government Document.

Defendant Tonijah Emanuel Criss of Phillipsburg, was also found guilty of four (4) of the aforementioned second degree crimes (Racketeering, Transferring False Government Documents, Conspiracy to Transfer False Government Documents and Conspiracy to Commit Theft by Deception) and twenty (20) third degree crimes including multiple counts of Forgery, Uttering a Forged Instrument, Exhibiting a False Government Document and Wrongful Impersonation.

Defendant Tia-Staucia Estee, a/k/a Tia Perrin of Reading, Pa. was found guilty of the same four (4) second degree crimes as defendant Tonijah Emanuel Criss as well as five (5) fourth degree crimes of Possession of False Government Documents.

Defendant Trezmynn Emond Criss of Phillipsburg, was found guilty of the same four (4) second degree crimes as defendant Tonijah Emanuel Criss as well as seventeen (17) third degree crimes, including multiple counts of Forgery, Uttering a Forged Instrument, Exhibiting a False Government Document, Wrongful Impersonation and Theft by Deception.

Defendant Tihee Jabbar Brisbane of Whippany was found guilty of the two (2) counts of Computer Criminal Activity that were presented to the jury. Following the guilty verdicts, the Honorable Robert B. Reed, J.S.C. revoked the bail of all defendants and remanded them to the Somerset County Jail with the exception of defendant

Brisbane who was continued on the \$50,000.00 bail previously posted.

Defendants Tonijah Emanuel Criss and Trezmyynn Emond Criss are the sons of Eric Criss. Defendant Tia-Staucia Estee a/k/a Tia Perrin is the step-daughter of Eric Criss and the wife of co-defendant Terrell Perrin whose case is pending.

Prosecutor Soriano said that defendant Eric Criss' criminal enterprise was primarily devoted to defrauding banking and financial institutions located throughout the State of New Jersey, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the States of New York, Connecticut, and Ohio.

Prosecutor Soriano said the scheme to defraud banks was accomplished through the manufacturing and uttering of fictitious payroll checks to unsuspecting bank tellers. Defendant Eric Criss, along with members of his enterprise, would obtain legitimate payroll or business checks and scan the checks into a computer system. The main defendants would then alter the checks by imposing a fictitious "payee name" along with a new check number before printing a new check. The main defendants would then create fictitious drivers licenses and credit cards bearing the name of the fictitious "payees". The drivers' licenses and credit cards were used as proof of identification when the fictitious checks were presented to the tellers. The phony drivers licenses would contain a photograph of the "runners" who worked for the enterprise and who presented the fictitious checks for payment.

Prosecutor Soriano said the runners would typically receive between ten and twenty percent of the face value of the checks they cashed for the enterprise. Defendant Eric Criss typically received fifty percent of the face value of each check cashed. The remaining balance was split between the enterprise members who supervised the runners responsible for cashing the checks.

The Somerset County Prosecutor's Office, Special Investigations Unit, began an investigation following a referral from Bedminster Township Police Detective Sergeant Craig Meyer. Sergeant Meyer initially investigated a report that the Peapack-Gladstone Bank accepted and cashed fourteen fictitious checks that were drawn against a legitimate payroll account. The fraudulent payroll checks contained the legitimate name and bank account information for Custom Alloy Corporation of High Bridge Borough, Hunterdon County, New Jersey. The fictitious checks were cashed over a two-day period and at eight different Peapack-Gladstone Bank branches in Somerset, Morris and Union Counties. Subsequent investigation revealed that a number of additional banks and companies were also victimized in the same manner.

The Prosecutor's Office investigation was led by Detective Sergeant John W. Fodor, IV, and was supervised by Assistant Prosecutor Matthew Murphy, who represented the State in the two-month trial of the above defendants. During the investigation, which lasted approximately six months, County Detectives obtained copies of fictitious checks and bank surveillance photographs from banks located in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut and Ohio. Those documents provided important evidence used to identify and arrest the runners who actually presented the fictitious checks at Peapack-Gladstone Bank branches. The banks have reported losses in excess of \$600,000.00 in fictitious checks linked to this criminal enterprise.

Prosecutor Soriano said that during the execution of two Search Warrants obtained during the investigation, county Detectives also uncovered confidential business records belonging to Verizon Wireless. Verizon Wireless maintains office buildings and a corporate headquarters in Somerset County. Corporate security officials with Verizon Wireless confirmed that the documents recovered by county detectives were customer account summaries belonging to 2,700 Verizon Wireless customers. The customer account summaries contained personal identification information, such as the customer's name, address, cellular account information, social security number and/or federal taxpayer identification number. Verizon Wireless corporate officials reacted quickly to the breach of their confidential records. Verizon Wireless volunteered to assist law enforcement by contacting each one of their effected customers. Defendant Brisbane had previously been employed as a telemarketing representative for Verizon Wireless from November 3, 2003, until January 26, 2005. Defendant Brisbane worked at the

Verizon Wireless offices located in Branchburg Township, Somerset County.

Prosecutor Soriano said the New Jersey Division of Taxation also joined in the investigation of defendant Eric Criss. The Division of Taxation determined that defendant Eric Criss failed to file State income tax returns for the calendar year 2007. Defendant Eric Criss was also found guilty of the third degree crime of Failure to File State Income Tax Reports.

The sentencing of all defendants is scheduled for January 28, 2011. There is a presumption of incarceration on each second degree offense and each offense carries a maximum of ten years incarceration. The maximum period of incarceration for the third degree offenses is five years and is eighteen months for the fourth degree offenses.