KATHERINE FERNANDEZ RUNDLE
STATE ATTORNEY

ELEVENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
IN AND FOR MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

4 Charged in Money Transfer Scam
Walmart Victimized for over $360,000

Miami (April 23, 2021) - Miami-Dade State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle and Miami-Dade Police Director Alfredo Ramirez announce the arrests of four individuals involved in financial thefts via the fraudulent transfer of money using Walmart's wire transfer services.

Charged today are 31-year-old Emmanuel Alexis, 31-year-old Jahson Rayon Linton, 30-year- old Michelle Denise Gilyard and 26-year-old Vitnelson Saint Fleur. All four individuals are being charged with 1 count of the 1st Degree felonies of Organized Scheme to Defraud and Conspiracy to Commit an Organized Scheme to Defraud. Alexis and Gilyard are also being charged with 1 count of the 1st Degree Felony of Grand Theft. Saint Fleur and Linton are being charged with 1 count of the 2nd Degree Felony of Grand Theft.

"Today's sophisticated scammers are always probing to find ways to grab the cash of every business and every consumer," said State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle. "Gaining the assistance of a trusted employee always makes the criminal's job easier. It takes the work of skillful investigators to unravel their strategies and bring these individuals to justice. Miami-Dade County and Walmart are fortunate that there are such dedicated individuals working both in-house at Walmart and in the Miami-Dade Police Department."

Walmart stores offer their customers a money transfer service that allows customers at any Walmart store in the United States to send money to an individual at any other Walmart facility in the country with sufficient identification. Walmart contracts with MoneyGram and RIA, two independent money transfer services, to process these transactions. In late 2018, the Global Investigations Branch of Walmart uncovered a number of fraudulent schemes linked to money transfer activity. The thieves used falsified caller identification (called "spoofing") so that calls made to Walmart money transfer employees appeared to be coming from the Walmart "Home Office", "NCR" (Walmart's computer repair vendor), or "MoneyGram". With this veneer of authority, the caller would request "system tests" money transfers to be made, which they claimed they would then cancel on their end. The transfers, never canceled, allowed fraudsters to subsequently retrieve the money.

"The Miami-Dade Police Department worked closely with the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office to bring this fraud organization to justice. Our Economic Crimes Bureau investigators are driven professionals that will not rest until cases are solved," commented Director Alfredo "Freddy" Ramirez III.

As the "spoofed" telephone calls began to be recognized by Walmart, a way was found to identify the fraud and cancel those transfers.

FOR FURTHER
INFORMATION CONTACT:

Ed Griffith, Public Information Officer
(305) 547-0535
EdGriffith@MiamiSAO.com

This led to a new approach by fraudsters allegedly utilizing Walmart employees as key players who would find ways of overriding the canceled transfers. Michelle Denise Gilyard, an employee working at a North Miami Beach store, and Vitnelson Saint Fleur, an employee working at a Palm Springs store, were allegedly paid per transaction by Emmanuel Alexis and/or Jahson Rayon Linton to provide refunds on money transfer transactions that were often already flagged as fraudulent.

Both Gilyard and Saint Fleur allegedly verified the existence of the suspended transactions, processed them, and then paid the monies to their accomplices. For their alleged participation, both Gilyard and Saint Fleur were paid $200.00 or $300.00 cash per each transaction. Gilyard allegedly processed a total of 130 fraudulent refund transactions amounting to $283,587.47 between June 29, 2018 and January 24, 2019. Saint Fleur allegedly processed a total of 36 fraudulent refunds totaling $79,664.32 between September 8, 2018 and January 1, 2019.

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