



718.286.6000
WWW.QUEENSDA.ORG

QUEENS COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY
125-01 QUEENS BOULEVARD
KEW GARDENS, NEW YORK 11415-1568



MELINDA KATZ
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
THURSDAY, MAY 8, 2025

CONTACT: PRESS OFFICE (718) 286-6315
QDACommunications@queensda.org

**TWENTY DEFENDANTS INDICTED IN VEHICLE THEFT RING DUBBED OPERATION
HELLCAT**

*Three-year Investigation Revealed Widespread Stolen Car Operation in Tri-State Area
Fourteen Defendants Charged with Enterprise Corruption; Face up to 25 Years in Prison, if Convicted*

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz, New York City Police Commissioner Jessica S. Tisch and New York State Police Superintendent Steven G. James announced today that 20 defendants have been indicted and variously charged in a wide-ranging scheme to steal cars -- from Hondas to Dodge Hellcats to BMWs, Mercedes-Benzes and Land Rovers -- throughout New York City and its suburbs. Some of the vehicles were stolen out of owners' driveways, some with the keys or key fobs inside. The vehicles -- valued at more than \$4.6 million -- were often sold including through advertisements on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram.

The indictments are the result of a three-year investigation by the Queens District Attorney's office, the NYPD and New York State Police and it was dubbed Operation Hellcat. The defendants are charged with the larcenies and criminal possession of 126 cars, 44 of which were purchased by undercover officers. The investigation involved the use of court-authorized wiretaps and also resulted in the seizure of three weapons including a semi-automatic rifle.

District Attorney Katz said: "This is one of the most prolific and organized auto theft rings we have ever uncovered in New York City. With these indictments, we have dismantled a criminal enterprise that stole at least \$4.6 million worth of vehicles from our streets and driveways. Our painstaking investigation employed undercover officers and court-authorized wiretaps to disrupt these determined car thieves. I thank our partners at the NYPD, New York State Police and National Insurance Crime Bureau for their professionalism and expertise during this investigation."

Commissioner Jessica S. Tisch said: "Today's indictments mark a major victory in dismantling a sophisticated car theft ring operating across New York City. These criminals stole hundreds of vehicles, trafficking them across state lines and exploiting technology to bypass security. Thanks to the NYPD's Auto Crime Unit, our law enforcement partners, and the Queens District Attorney's office, these individuals are now facing justice. The NYPD will not tolerate those who target our communities and will use every resource to hold them accountable."

New York State Police Superintendent Steven G. James said: "This case underscores the importance of long-term, collaborative investigations in dismantling complex criminal enterprises. The individuals indicted operated with a level of coordination and sophistication that posed a serious threat to

public safety across the tri-state area. I commend the dedicated members of the New York State Police Special Investigations Unit, our partners at the Queens District Attorney's Office, the NYPD, and our law enforcement colleagues across multiple states whose commitment and expertise brought this operation to a successful conclusion."

Fourteen defendants – Justin Santiago, Adrian Villegas, Bryan Bello, Enrique Lopez, Jennifer Nunez-Jimenez, Greg Lopez Febres, Angel Castillo, Roodler Pierre Louis, Jimmy Lopez Guzman, Jahfari Collier, Kevin Ochoa, Chandardat Singh, Usiamrin Chaleunsak and Franyeri Cabrera Morel – are charged in a 289-count indictment with enterprise corruption, grand larceny, criminal possession of stolen property and conspiracy. Four of those defendants are additionally charged in separate indictments. **SEE ADDENDUM**

Six others – Nyron Ramkhelawan, Brayahan Agudelo, Ricky Jimenez, Roberto Mendez, Carlton Vaughn and Jessie Pinales – are charged separately.

Four defendants were arraigned Wednesday and nine were arraigned today before Supreme Court Justice David Kirschner. Two others are expected to be arraigned today. Two defendants have not been apprehended and three others are expected to be arraigned at a later date.

In April 2022, the Queens District's Attorney's Office began a joint investigation with the NYPD Auto Crimes Unit's Major Case Team and the New York State Police Special Investigations Unit, Auto Theft Unit, Long Island into the theft of high-end vehicles in New York City and Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester Counties as well as New Jersey.

Investigators uncovered a highly coordinated auto theft enterprise with individuals who possessed specific skill sets and expertise – a theft group, social media brokers who advertised and sold cars, and black-market dealers and buyers, all of whom relied upon one another to target and steal cars.

Evidence revealed during the investigation tied the defendants to 126 stolen cars, 44 of which were purchased by undercover officers.

The thefts started in a low-tech manner targeting cars that were left unlocked with the key fobs inside. The alleged thieves then progressed to breaking into locked vehicles by using a screwdriver to punch out the driver's side door lock or breaking car windows to gain access. Once inside, they used a handheld device to connect to the car's onboard diagnostics system and program a new key fob.

The theft crew disabled the car's navigation system and searched for, and disposed of, any tracking devices so the owner could not pinpoint the vehicle's location.

At times, the defendants allegedly utilized scouts who identified high-end automobiles to steal. The scouts pinned the location of the car on a digital map and sent that information to the theft group. Members of theft crew then went out in groups of three to five to steal the cars.

Some of the stolen cars were parked for a short time on public streets so that, if a tracking system was still operable and police found the vehicle, it would not be traced to theft crew. The group also

obscured the publicly visible vehicle identification number or VIN or changed the license plates to fake or stolen tags.

Once a car was stolen, the vehicles were often sold to brokers within the organization's network and also advertised for sale in the New York City area through Facebook Marketplace, Instagram and Telegram.

The brokers quickly flipped the cars without altering the VINs, thus commanding below market prices -- from approximately \$1,000 to \$6,000 per car.

Three of the defendants, including two men who live in Tennessee, were considered dealers who allegedly bought cars directly from other members of the ring to resell them.

The stolen cars included 38 Acuras, 24 Hondas, 23 BMWs, 20 Dodges and three Jeeps. Fifty-two cars were stolen in Queens, 25 in Brooklyn, 14 in Nassau County, 10 in the Bronx, 10 in Westchester County, nine in Staten Island, three in Suffolk County, one in Manhattan, one in New Jersey and one in Massachusetts.

The undercover officers also purchased three firearms -- a semi-automatic rifle and two pistols.

Sixteen defendants were arrested yesterday in New York and Tennessee.

One of the defendants had also been charged early this year after officers responded to a 911 call on January 2, 2025, of an auto theft of a 2022 Acura TLX in progress in Queens Village. An NYPD officer spotted the speeding Acura and followed it. The defendant allegedly exited the front passenger seat, tossed a laptop bag on the ground and began walking away before he was stopped by officers. A search of the bag found a key reprogramming device and several generic key fobs.

The investigation was conducted by members of the NYPD Auto Crime Unit's Major Case Team under the supervision of Deputy Inspector Daniel Campbell and members of the New York State Police Special Investigations Unit, Auto Theft Unit, Long Island, under the supervision of Lieutenant Timothy Gould and under the overall supervision of Major James Browne.

The District Attorney also thanks members of the Tennessee Highway Patrol Special Investigations Bureau, Metropolitan Nashville Police Department, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, Dartmouth Police Department, Nassau County Police Department, Suffolk County Police Department, Yonkers Police Department, New York State Department of Motor Vehicles, Division of Field Investigation, and Supervisory Special Agent Justin Hoffman of the National Insurance Crime Board for their invaluable assistance in this investigation.

Assistant District Attorney Lissa L. Yang, Section Chief of the District Attorney's Major Economic Crimes Bureau's Auto Crime Unit, with the assistance of Assistant District Attorney Jessica Coalter of the Major Economic Crimes Bureau, are prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Mary Lowenburg, Bureau Chief, Catherine C. Kane, Senior Deputy Bureau Chief, Jonathan Scharf, Deputy Bureau Chief, and with the assistance of Intelligence Analyst Kathryn Isaac, Intelligence Analyst Megan Kane, and Supervising Intelligence Analyst Victoria Filipe, under the

supervision of Assistant District Attorney Shanon LaCorte, Bureau Chief of the District Attorney's Crime Strategies and Intelligence Bureau, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Gerard A. Brave.

Criminal complaints and indictments are accusations. A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

#

ADDENDUM

JUSTIN "CUPCAKE" SANTIAGO, 33, of 86th Street in Ozone Park was charged with enterprise corruption, criminal possession of stolen property in the second, third and fourth degrees, grand larceny in the second, third and fourth degrees and conspiracy in the fifth degree. If convicted, Santiago faces up to 25 years in prison.

He was charged in a separate indictment with criminal sale of a controlled substance in the third degree and conspiracy in the fourth degree. If convicted, he faces up to nine years in prison.

ADRIAN "BEN BILLS" VILLEGAS, 32, of 80th Street in Lindenwood was charged with enterprise corruption, grand larceny in the second, third and fourth degrees, criminal possession of stolen property in the second, third and fourth degrees, and conspiracy in the fifth degree. If convicted, Villegas faces up to 25 years in prison.

BRYAN "SAVV" BELLO, 24, of Troutman Street in Brooklyn, was charged with enterprise corruption, grand larceny in the third and fourth degrees, criminal possession of stolen property in the third and fourth degrees and conspiracy in the fifth degree. If convicted, Bello faces up to 25 years in prison.

ENRIQUE "FINESSE" LOPEZ, 24, of Marvin Street in Far Rockaway, was charged with enterprise corruption, criminal possession of stolen property in the second, third and fourth degrees and conspiracy in the fifth degree. If convicted, Lopez faces up to 25 years in prison.

He was charged in a separate indictment with criminal possession of forgery devices, attempted grand larceny in the third and fourth degrees, attempted criminal possession of stolen property in the third degree, possession of burglar's tools and criminal possession of a forged instrument in the third degree. If convicted, he faces up to seven years in prison.

JENNIFER NUNEZ-JIMENEZ, 26, of Macombs Road in the Bronx was charged with enterprise corruption, grand larceny in the second, third and fourth degrees and criminal possession of stolen property in the second, third and fourth degrees. If convicted, Nunez-Jimenez faces up to 25 years in prison.

GREG "FINGERS" LOPEZ FEBRES, 32, of Wavecrest Drive in Mastic Beach, Long Island, was charged with enterprise corruption, grand larceny in the third and fourth degrees, criminal possession of stolen property in the third and fourth degrees and conspiracy in the fifth degree. If convicted, Febres faces up to 25 years in prison.

He was charged in a separate indictment with criminal possession of stolen property in the third and fourth degrees and conspiracy in the fifth degree. If convicted, he faces up to seven years in prison.

ANGEL CASTILLO, 23, of Elliot Place in the Bronx, was charged with enterprise corruption, grand larceny in the third and fourth degrees, criminal possession of stolen property in the third and fourth degrees and conspiracy in the fifth degree. If convicted, Castillo faces up to 25 years in prison.

JIMMY LOPEZ GUZMAN, 23, of Stockholm Street in Brooklyn, was charged with enterprise corruption, grand larceny in the third and fourth degrees, criminal possession of stolen property in the third and fourth degrees and conspiracy in the fifth degree. If convicted, Guzman faces up to 25 years in prison.

ROODLER A. PIERRE LOUIS, 26, of Garden Place in Hempstead, Long Island, was charged with enterprise corruption, grand larceny in the second, third and fourth degrees, criminal possession of stolen property in the second, third and fourth degrees and conspiracy in the fifth degree. If convicted, Louis faces up to 25 years in prison.

JAHFARI “MEEK” COLLIER, 20, of Hart Street in Brooklyn, was charged with enterprise corruption, grand larceny in the second and fourth degrees, criminal possession of stolen property in the second, third and fourth degrees and conspiracy in the fifth degree. If convicted, Collier faces up to 25 years in prison.

KEVIN OCHOA, 25, of Benedict Avenue in the Bronx, was charged with enterprise corruption, grand larceny in the third and fourth degrees, criminal possession of stolen property in the third and fourth degrees and conspiracy in the fifth degree. If convicted, Ochoa faces up to 25 years in prison.

He was charged in a separate indictment with criminal possession of stolen property in the second, third and fourth degrees and conspiracy in the fifth degree. If convicted, he faces up to seven years in prison.

CHANDARDAT SINGH, 46, of East Williston Avenue in Floral Park, was charged with enterprise corruption, criminal possession of stolen property in the second, third and fourth degrees, illegal possession of a vehicle identification number and conspiracy in the fifth degree. If convicted, Singh faces up to 25 years in prison.

USIAMRIN “LIN” CHALEUNSAK, 45, Wild Apple Court in Antioch, Tenn., was charged with enterprise corruption, criminal possession of stolen property in the second, third and fourth degrees and conspiracy in the fifth degree. If convicted, Chaleunsak faces up to 25 years in prison.

FRANYERI “FRANKY” CABRERA MOREL, 28, of Drummond Drive in Nashville, was charged with enterprise corruption, criminal possession of stolen property in the second, third and fourth degrees and conspiracy in the fifth degree. If convicted, Morel faces up to 25 years in prison.

NYRON RAMKHELAWAN, 25, of 219th Street in Queens Village, was charged with criminal possession of stolen property in the second, third degrees and fourth degrees and grand larceny in the third and fourth degrees. If convicted, Ramkhelawan faces up to 15 years in prison.

BRAYAHAN AGUDELO, 31, of Austin Street in Forest Hills, was charged with criminal possession of stolen property in the second, third and fourth degrees, criminal possession of a weapon in the second degree, criminal sale of a firearm in the third degree and conspiracy in the fourth and fifth degrees. If convicted, Agudelo faces up to 15 years in prison.

RICKY JIMENEZ, 29, of Hemlock Street in Brooklyn, was charged with criminal possession of a weapon in the second and third degrees, criminal sale of a firearm in the second and third degrees, criminal possession of stolen property in the third and fourth degrees and conspiracy in the fourth and fifth degrees. If convicted, Jimenez faces up to 15 years in prison.

ROBERTO MENDEZ, 26, of 71st Avenue in Pomonok, was charged with criminal possession of stolen property in the third and fourth degrees. If convicted, Mendez faces up to seven years in prison.

CARLTON VAUGHN, 33, of Bradford Street in Brooklyn, was charged with criminal possession of stolen property in the third and fourth degrees and conspiracy in the fifth degree. If convicted, he faces up to seven years in prison.

JESSIE PINALES, 30, of Parsons Boulevard in Pomonok, was charged with criminal possession of stolen property in the third and fourth degrees. If convicted, Pinales faces up to seven years in prison.

Criminal complaints and indictments are accusations. A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

###

Note to Editors: Archived press releases are available at www.queensda.org.

