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**MOTHER AND DAUGHTER CHARGED WITH OPERATING INTERNATIONAL
STOLEN MERCHANDISE RING FROM EAST ELMHURST APARTMENT AND
VALLEY STREAM HOME**

*Defendants Allegedly Ordered Underlings to Steal Specific Clothing, Beauty Products from Local Retailers;
Pair Sold Merchandise Through Social Media and Shipped Products to Dominican Republic*

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz and New York State Police Superintendent Steven G. James announced today that mother and daughter Maria Betances and Leslie Cruz were charged with criminal possession of stolen property, grand larceny, conspiracy and other crimes for allegedly operating a retail theft and fencing ring from a registered daycare. The duo allegedly directed “boosters” to steal specific in-demand merchandise from retailers – including cosmetics and clothing – and then resold the goods locally as well as shipped them to the Dominican Republic for resale.

The investigation included the sale by undercover officers of purported stolen goods to the defendants at their homes in East Elmhurst and Valley Stream. Maria Betances operated a daycare center from her Valley Stream home while the sales took place. More than 5,000 pieces of stolen goods and purported stolen merchandise, with a combined retail value of \$159,602, were recovered along with \$30,000 in cash.

District Attorney Katz said: “As alleged, these defendants directed theft crews to steal from numerous retailers in the New York City area, stored the goods in their homes and then advertised the merchandise via social media for sale locally. Other products were shipped to the Dominican Republic for resale in that country. Retail theft hurts all consumers and leads to higher prices on the checkout line. I thank our partners at the New York State Police and Homeland Security Investigations for their work on this case and we pledge to use every tool at our disposal to stop these organized retail theft rings.”

New York State Police Superintendent Steven G. James said: “Organized retail theft operations harm businesses, increase costs for consumers and often extend across multiple jurisdictions. This investigation demonstrates the importance of strong partnerships and coordinated enforcement. I commend the members of our Special Investigations Unit, the Queens District Attorney’s Office, Homeland Security Investigations and the Nassau County Police Department for their work to disrupt this alleged criminal enterprise and hold those responsible accountable.”

Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) New York Acting Special Agent in Charge Pete Gizas said: “The defendants are accused of directing booster crews to steal merchandise from legitimate retailers, then reselling

those goods through an international operation designed to turn theft into profit. Their alleged conduct caused real harm: it drove losses for businesses, increased risks for retail employees, raised costs for consumers, and brought criminal activity into a home that also operated as a daycare. HSI New York, the Queens District Attorney's Office and the New York State Police will continue to utilize every tool at our disposal to protect the businesses, consumers, and neighborhoods impacted by these organized retail theft schemes.”

Maria “Glenny” Betances, 47, of Valley Stream and Leslie Cruz, 24, of East Elmhurst, were charged in felony criminal complaints with criminal possession of stolen property in the second degree, attempted criminal possession of stolen property in the second degree, grand larceny in the third degree and conspiracy in the fourth degree. Maria Betances was additionally charged with endangering the welfare of a child.

Betances was arraigned July 24 by Judge Thomas Wright who ordered her to return to court September 29. Cruz was arraigned July 22 by Judge Lana Schlesinger who ordered her to return to court September 29. They face five to 15 years in prison, if convicted. Two defendants are in custody on other matters and are expected to be arraigned at a later date. Two additional individuals remain at large.

DA Katz said that, according to the charges and investigation, the Queens DA’s office initiated a probe into a retail theft and fencing operation based at Maria Betenaces’ home and daycare operation with the New York State Police Special Investigations Unit and Homeland Security Investigations. Betances ran Smile Bright Day Care for children from 6 weeks to 12 years old from the residence.

The mother and daughter allegedly directed four others, the booster crew, to steal large quantities of goods from retailers including Marshalls, TJ Maxx, Home Goods, CVS and Ulta Beauty in Queens and Staten Island as well as Nassau, Westchester and Rockland counties. They asked for items they could resell quickly and for a high price. The crew sold the items to Betances at her home, at Cruz’s apartment or at locations in Queens near Cruz’s home.

Between February 10, 2026, and July 16, 2026, undercover officers made 10 sales of purported stolen goods to Betances and her daughter. The duo paid anywhere from 17 percent to 37 percent of the retail value of the goods, which included beauty products and clothing. During the first such sale, Betances told investigators that she was interested in buying high-end beauty products from Dior, Gucci, Prada, Chanel and other brands. She is also alleged to have requested 2,000 pairs of women’s skinny jeans from American Eagle.

On April 14, a blue shipping drum was taken from Betances’ garage by a shipping company and loaded into a truck. US Customs and Border Patrol placed a hold on the barrel at the shipper’s facility. A court-authorized search of the contents resulted in the recovery of 760 beauty items with a combined retail value of \$22,419, that were allegedly stolen by the defendants’ booster crew or purchased by the defendants from the undercover officers.

A search warrant executed on July 21 at Betances’ home resulted in the seizure of 4,272 pieces of allegedly stolen and purported stolen merchandise with a combined retail value of \$131,114 including cosmetics, sex toys, pajamas and clothing from retailers such as Ulta Beauty, Victoria’s Secret, Polo Ralph Lauren and others; hundreds of broken security devices and alarms; and tools to remove security devices. A total of \$10,000 was also recovered. A search warrant executed that same day at Leslie Cruz’s home resulted in the recovery of 101 pieces of allegedly stolen merchandise with a combined value of \$6,067 from Macy’s, American Eagle, Longchamp, Walmart and other retailers. A total of \$20,000 was also recovered.

The investigation was conducted by members of the District Attorney’s Detectives Bureau assigned to the

Crime Strategies and Intelligence Bureau under the supervision of Lieutenant Joseph Oliver, Sergeant David Moore, and under the overall supervision of Chief Investigator Robert LaPollo; as well as members of the New York State Police Special Investigations Unit under the supervision of Senior Investigator Mark Buglione, and under the overall supervision of Lieutenant Matthew J. O’Connell and Major James M. Browne.

The District Attorney also thanks members of the Nassau County Police Department for their assistance.

Assistant District Attorney Brandi S. Kligman, Deputy Chief of the District Attorney’s Crime Strategies and Intelligence Bureau, is prosecuting the case with the assistance of Intelligence Analyst Bushra Ahmed and Senior Intelligence Analyst Hong Man Lam, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Shanon N. LaCorte, Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Joseph T. Conley III.

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

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