

Department of Justice

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BUFFALO MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO FOOD STAMP FRAUD
TEXAS MAN SENTENCED FOR SELLING COUNTERFEIT NIKE SNEAKERS

BUFFALO, N.Y.--U.S. Attorney William J. Hochul, Jr. announced today that LaKeith Fowler, 32, of DeSoto, Texas, who was convicted of conspiracy to traffic in counterfeit Nike sneakers, was sentenced to 33 months in prison by U.S. District Judge Richard J. Arcara. The defendant was also ordered to pay \$240,000 in restitution to Nike. Previously, the defendant had agreed to forfeit \$44,500 in money to the Government.

Assistant U.S. Attorney John E. Rogowski, who handled the case, stated that in 2007 Fowler operated a retail store in Dallas, Texas, where he sold counterfeit Nike sneakers. The defendant also sold other merchandise such as purses, watches and apparel. Fowler obtained the counterfeit sneakers from a source in New York City, Malik Bazzi. Bazzi obtained the counterfeit sneakers from several individuals who imported the sneakers from China to New York City. Bazzi then sold them to customers throughout the United States, including Fowler in Texas and two individuals in Western New York.

Fowler purchased between 10,000 and 12,000 pairs of counterfeit sneakers from Bazzi and then sold the counterfeit Nike sneakers to customers at about half the price of genuine Nike sneakers. The defendant, who was first arrested in connection with this case in September, 2007, was one of 23 individuals charged in the case. Twenty-two of the defendants were convicted, and one defendant was acquitted after a trial before Judge Arcara in October of this year.

“Enforcement of the nation’s intellectual property laws protects not only the business or individual who first developed the idea or commodity,” said U.S. Attorney Hochul, “In addition, innocent purchasers, legitimate retail establishments, and even local, county and state governments all suffer from black market profiteering of counterfeit goods.”

During the course of this international investigation, law enforcement seized over \$1,000,000, over 310,00 pairs of counterfeit Nike sneakers, and a variety of other products and property. The prosecution effectively shut down a large, multi-faceted counterfeiting operation where the sneakers were illegally manufactured in the People's Republic of China, transported via container to New York City, and then distributed throughout the United States. Law enforcement utilized a number of techniques, including court ordered wiretaps and search warrants and undercover operations.

The sentencing is the culmination of an investigation on the part of Special Agents of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigations, under the direction of James C. Spero, Special Agent in Charge.

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