

## **Tech-Support Takedown 2019 Fact Sheet**

The Department of Justice, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), and several state Attorneys General today announced enforcement actions to combat technical-support fraud schemes that collectively have defrauded tens of thousands of U.S. victims. The actions include criminal charges, criminal proceed seizures, civil injunction lawsuits, and the execution of search warrants.

These actions are a coordinated, multi-lateral effort by numerous Federal and State agencies, including the Department of Justice’s Consumer Protection Branch, Computer Crimes and Intellectual Property Section, and Antitrust Division, and the U.S. Attorneys’ Offices in the Central District of California, the District of Maryland, the District of Rhode Island, the Middle District of Florida, the Northern District of Georgia, the Southern District of Florida, the Southern District of Illinois, the Southern District of New York, and the Western District of Washington. The criminal cases were investigated by the FBI, the Postal Inspection Service, and the Department of Homeland Security. The Federal Trade Commission and state Attorneys General in Florida, Minnesota, Ohio, and Texas brought actions to disrupt technical-support scams. The U.K.’s City of London Police also pursued charges against such schemes, which often victimize consumers in the U.K., the U.S., and other nations around the world.

Technical-support scams have been flourishing. They are perpetrated in several ways: Fraudsters make telephone calls and claim to be computer technicians associated with a well-known company or they may use internet pop-up messages to warn about non-existent computer problems. The scammers claim they have detected viruses or other malware on the victim’s computer. They pretend to be “tech support” and ask that the victim give them remote access to his or her computer. Eventually, they diagnose a non-existent problem and ask the victim to pay for unnecessary – or even harmful – services.

Many of the cases announced today targeted U.S.-based defendants who helped call centers in India to commit technical-support fraud. U.S.-based individuals, sometimes known as “runners,” “money mules,” or “payment gateways,” collected victim payments through various means, kept a fee, and transmitted profits to India-based call center operators.

The passages below describe cases brought as part of today’s Tech-Support Takedown. The charging documents relevant to several Department of Justice actions are available on this page.

### ***Two Individuals Charged for Recruiting U.S. Coconspirator in Technical-Support Scheme***

This week, Indian citizens Aman Mehndiratta and Aman Kheira were charged with wire fraud in connection with a technical-support call center in India. The criminal complaint alleged that Mehndiratta and Kheira recruited a California resident – Parmjit Brar – to serve as a payment gateway for the scheme. Many victims lost hundreds of dollars, while some elderly victims lost hundreds of thousands of dollars. This case is being prosecuted by the Consumer Protection Branch, the Antitrust Division, and the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Central District of California. In 2016, Mehndiratta was charged in the U.S. District Court for the District of South

Carolina with conspiracy to commit money laundering for nearly identical conduct with another U.S. individual.

The wire fraud charge carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison.

#### ***New York Resident Charged with Laundering Money on Behalf of Technical-Support Scheme***

A citizen of India residing in Middleton, New York, was charged with conspiracy to commit money laundering for facilitating technical-support fraud. The criminal complaint alleged that the defendant opened bank accounts with at least seven banks in the Middletown, New York area to deposit payments from victims, most of whom were elderly. He allegedly kept some of the money for himself and transmitted profits to his coconspirators. This case is being prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York.

The charge carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison.

#### ***Rhode Island Residents Charged with Felonies for Technical-Support Scheme***

Five individuals were charged with conspiracy, mail fraud, wire fraud, bank fraud, and aggravated identity theft for their participation in a technical-support scheme. The criminal complaint alleged that the defendants played various roles in receiving and transferring unlawful proceeds to coconspirators, including those in India. This case is being prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Rhode Island.

The mail and wire fraud charges each carry a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison; the bank fraud and conspiracy charges carry a 30-year maximum penalty, and the aggravated identity theft charges carry a two-year maximum penalty.

#### ***Five Defendants Charged in Illinois Technical-Support Fraud Scheme***

Michael Austin Seward, 31, of Deerfield Beach, Florida, Kevin James McCormick, 46, of Delray Beach, Florida, Erica Crowell, 30, of Marlton, New Jersey, Kyle Swinson, 27, of New Bern, North Carolina, and Cary Lawing, 34, of Lincolnton, North Carolina, were charged with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and/or wire fraud for their participation in a technical-support scheme operated in Florida. The charges allege that each defendant participated in a technical-support scheme involving pop-up messages that falsely claimed that consumers had serious viruses or malware on their computers. According to the charging documents, telemarketers convinced consumers to grant remote access and ultimately used false representations and scare tactics to induce consumers to send money. These cases are being prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Illinois.

The charges carry a maximum penalty of 30 years in prison.

***Indian Citizen Charged with Knowingly Facilitating Technical-Support Scheme***

Mehboob Charania, 40, a citizen of India residing in Tucker, Georgia, pled guilty to serving as an unlicensed money transmitting business for payments induced by several types of telemarketing fraud schemes, including technical-support fraud. According to the charges, Charania received payments from victims via Western Union and MoneyGram using fake identification documents and fraudulent information, and deposited victim proceeds into bank accounts. The case is being prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia.

The charge to which Charania pled guilty carries a five-year maximum penalty.

***Florida Man Charged for Knowingly Facilitating Technical-Support Fraud***

Glenn Francis, 58, of Palm Harbor, Florida, was charged for serving as a runner and a domestic manager of a call center that engaged in several types of telemarketing fraud, including technical-support fraud. The indictment charged Francis with conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud, wire fraud, mail fraud, and money laundering. According to the indictment, Francis received checks and cash mailed from victims to his home office, deposited the checks, and sent payments (less a fee for his services) to his India-based coconspirators. The case is being prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Florida.

The charges carry a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison. The government has also sought forfeiture of Francis' unlawful proceeds.

Criminal charges described above are not evidence of guilt. Every defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

### ***Injunctions Sought Against Technical-Support Fraud Infrastructure***

The Department's Consumer Protection Branch, in partnership with the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, sought and obtained court orders against numerous entities and individuals to prevent them from conducting or facilitating fraudulent technical-support. Working with the U.S. Attorneys' Offices in the Central District of California, the District of Maryland, the Southern District of Florida, and the Western District of Washington, and the Antitrust Division, the Consumer Protection Branch filed cases against the following defendants:

- VCare USA LLC, a Washington state limited liability company, and its principal, Christine Reeves. The complaint filed in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington alleged that defendants assisted and facilitated an India-based call center conducting a technical-support scheme.
- Maven Infotech PVT. LTD., located in Kolkata, India. The complaint filed in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida alleged that defendant operated a call center engaged in a technical-support scheme.
- Infotagg Technology Solutions, LLC, a Delaware limited liability company. The complaint filed in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida alleged that defendant assisted and facilitated an India-based call center conducting a technical-support scheme.
- Elagoon Business Solutions PVT LTD., a/k/a Computer Phone Assist, located in Kolkata, India. The complaint filed in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington alleged that defendant operated a call center engaged in a technical-support scheme.
- VSupport, LP, a California limited partnership. The complaint filed in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida alleged that defendants assisted and facilitated an India-based call center conducting a technical-support scheme. A federal judge entered a preliminary injunction against the defendants, barring them from continuing to facilitate the scheme.
- Vesna Bacic, a Maryland resident. The complaint filed in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida alleged that Bacic assisted and facilitated an India-based call center conducting a technical-support scheme. A federal judge entered a permanent injunction against Bacic, barring her from continuing to facilitate the scheme.
- Jasvit Tahim, a Washington state resident. The complaint filed in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington alleged that Tahim assisted and facilitated an India-based call center conducting a technical-support scheme.
- Joy Emmanuel, a Washington state resident. The complaint filed in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington alleged that Emmanuel assisted and facilitated an India-based call center conducting a technical-support scheme.
- Bharatkumat Shah, a New York state resident. The complaint filed in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida alleged that Shah assisted and facilitated an India-based call center conducting a technical-support scheme.

- Deepak Gupta, an Arizona resident. The complaint filed in the U.S. District Court for the Central district of California alleged that Gupta assisted and facilitated an India-based call center conducting a technical-support scheme.
- Joshua Singh, a Texas resident. The complaint filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland alleged that Singh assisted and facilitated an India-based call center conducting a technical-support scheme.
- Robin Roomi, a Maryland resident. The complaint filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland alleged that Roomi assisted and facilitated an India-based call center conducting a technical-support scheme.
- John Callahan, a California resident. The complaint filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland alleged that Callahan assisted and facilitated an India-based call center conducting a technical-support scheme.

In addition to these actions, the Federal Trade Commission, several state Attorneys General, and the U.K.'s City of London Police took action against separate technical-support fraud schemes as part of the Tech-Support Takedown. Information about the Federal Trade Commission's cases is available [here](#). Information about the state Attorneys General cases is available [here](#). Information about the City of London Police action is available [here](#).

As part of the takedown, tech-support fraud consumer education campaigns were launched by the Federal Trade Commission, Senior Corps, and the state Attorneys General of Arizona, Connecticut, DC, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, Nebraska, Nevada, North Carolina, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Texas.