



U. S. Department of Justice

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FEDERAL JURY CONVICTS FORMER FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY C.A.R.E. STUDENTS OF CONSPIRACY, BANK FRAUD, AND AGGRAVATED IDENTITY THEFT

TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA – Jason R. Coody, Acting United States Attorney for the Northern District of Florida, today announced the convictions of Kh'lajuwon Amari Murat, 21, of Miramar, Florida, and Ariel Apperlyn Smith, 22, of Coral Springs, Florida. The convictions came today after a four-day federal jury trial.

The jury heard evidence that Murat and Smith, along with other students who enrolled at Florida State University (“FSU”) in the Center for Academic Retention and Enhancement (“C.A.R.E.”) and Kadeem Telfort, a former student and football player at the University of Florida, conspired to defraud federally insured financial institutions between July 1, 2017, and October 31, 2017. The jury heard from thirteen witnesses – many of whom were former FSU students – and received over 300 exhibits in evidence. The evidence presented proved that Murat and Telfort used the Internet and text messaging to unlawfully obtain credit card and debit card account numbers belonging to third parties, and that they used those account numbers to fraudulently deposit funds into the student accounts of multiple FSU students, including accounts belonging to Murat and Smith.

The evidence demonstrated that the group communicated by cell phone and text messaging to plan the execution of the scheme. Specifically, the jury heard that Murat requested the student account numbers from FSU students and also requested that the FSU students purchase merchandise from the FSU Bookstore using funds that he and Telfort had fraudulently deposited or would later fraudulently deposit into those students’ accounts. The FSU students then gave the purchased merchandise to Murat and others and were permitted to keep any remaining balance of the funds that Murat and Telfort fraudulently deposited into their student accounts for their own personal use. The evidence proved that in total, the group fraudulently obtained and attempted to obtain approximately \$53,000 in funds to which they were not entitled, and that FSU was victimized from chargebacks being issued by banks as a result of the fraudulent charges being disputed by the third-party debit and credit card accountholders.

The jury found Murat and Smith guilty of all counts as charged in the indictment. Murat was found guilty of conspiracy to commit bank and wire fraud, 16 counts of bank fraud, and six counts of aggravated identity theft. Smith was found guilty of conspiracy to commit bank and wire fraud and two counts of bank fraud.

Sentencing hearings for both defendants are scheduled for August 5, 2021, at 10:00 a.m., before the Honorable Judge Robert Hinkle at the United States Courthouse in Tallahassee. Both defendants face a potential maximum penalty of 20 years in prison for each conspiracy to commit bank fraud and bank fraud count, and Murat faces an additional 2-year mandatory minimum prison sentence, consecutive to any other sentence imposed, for each aggravated identity theft count.

These convictions were the result of a collaborative investigation by the Florida State University Police Department and the United States Secret Service. Assistant United States Attorney Justin M. Keen prosecuted the case.

The United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Florida is one of 94 offices that serve as the nation's principal litigators under the direction of the Attorney General. To access public court documents online, please visit the [U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida](http://www.flnd.uscourts.gov) website. For more information about the United States Attorney's Office, Northern District of Florida, visit <http://www.justice.gov/usao/fln/index.html>.

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