

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	:	Hon. Edward S. Kiel
	:	
v.	:	Mag. No. 24-15009
	:	
NATHANIEL BELL,	:	<b>CRIMINAL COMPLAINT</b>
a/k/a "David Jones,"	:	
L'HUBERMAN FELIX,	:	<b><u>Filed Under Seal</u></b>
DAYANNA SARANGO-HIDALGO, and	:	
JOHNATHAN TANKSLEY	:	

I, Brendan Collins, being duly sworn, state the following is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief:

**SEE ATTACHMENT A**

I further state that I am a Special Agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and that this complaint is based on the following facts:

**SEE ATTACHMENT B**

continued on the attached pages and made a part hereof.

/w/ Brendan Collins  
Brendan Collins, Special Agent  
Federal Bureau of Investigation

Sworn to and subscribed via telephone on this 29th day of January, 2024 in Newark, New Jersey.

Authorized telephonically pursuant to Fed. R. Crim. P. Rule 4.1

/s/ Edward S. Kiel at 3:50 p.m.  
Hon. Edward S. Kiel  
United States Magistrate Judge

**ATTACHMENT A**

**COUNT ONE**

**(Conspiracy to Receive Stolen Vehicles)**

From as early as in or around October 2022 through in or around September 2023, in the District of New Jersey, and elsewhere, defendants,

**NATHANIEL BELL,  
a/k/a “David Jones,”  
L’HUBERMANE FELIX,  
DAYANNA SARANGO-HIDALGO, and  
JOHNATHAN TANKSLEY**

knowingly and intentionally conspired with each other and others to receive, possess, conceal, store, and dispose of motor vehicles, which had crossed State boundaries after being stolen, knowing the same to have been stolen, contrary to Title 18, United States Code, Section 2313.

In violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 371.

**COUNTS TWO through SIX**  
**(Altering or Removing Motor Vehicle Identification Numbers)**

On or about the dates set forth below, in the District of New Jersey, and elsewhere, defendant,

**NATHANIEL BELL,**  
**a/k/a “David Jones”**

did knowingly remove, obliterate, tamper with, and alter identification numbers on motor vehicles, namely on the motor vehicles specified below, each constituting a separate count of this Criminal Complaint:

<b>Count</b>	<b>Approximate Date</b>	<b>Description of Vehicle with Altered VIN</b>
Two	August 2, 2022	2019 Dodge Charger
Three	September 26, 2022	2020 Chevrolet Suburban
Four	October 20, 2022	2019 Jeep Grand Cherokee
Five	July 24, 2023	2020 Dodge Durango
Six	July 26, 2023	2020 Jeep Grand Cherokee

In violation of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 511 and 2.

**COUNT SEVEN**  
**(Transportation of Stolen Vehicle)**

On or about July 26, 2023, in the District of New Jersey, and elsewhere,  
defendant,

**NATHANIEL BELL,**  
**a/k/a “David Jones,”**

did knowingly transport in interstate commerce a motor vehicle, namely a 2020  
Dodge Durango, knowing the same to have been stolen.

In violation of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 2312 and 2.

## **ATTACHMENT B**

I, Brendan Collins, am a Special Agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. I am fully familiar with the facts set forth herein based on my own investigation, my conversations with other law enforcement officers, and my review of reports, documents, photographs, videos, and other items of evidence. Because this complaint is being submitted for a limited purpose, I have not set forth each and every fact that I know concerning this investigation. Where I assert that an event took place on a particular date, I am asserting that it took place on or about the date alleged.

### **The Conspiracy**

1. At all times relevant to this Complaint, defendants NATHANIEL BELL (“BELL”), L’HUBERMANE FELIX (“FELIX”), DAYANNA SARANGO-HIDALGO (“SARANGO-HIDALGO”), and JOHNATHAN TANKSLEY (“TANKSLEY”) (collectively, the “Defendants”) conspired with each other and others to obtain, receive, possess, conceal, and store stolen vehicles from New Jersey, New York, Florida and elsewhere; alter the vehicle identification numbers (“VINs”) (a process called “re-vinning”) and/or obtain fraudulent titles for the stolen vehicles to conceal the fact they were stolen, and then resell the stolen vehicles to car dealerships and individual purchasers.

2. In or around July 2023, law enforcement lawfully obtained a search warrant for the iCloud account associated with BELL’s cell phone and his known e-mail address (“BELL’s iCloud”). BELL’s iCloud contained text message communications, photographs, and other information about the stolen vehicles and the sale of these vehicles to individual purchasers and dealerships.

3. In some instances, BELL and/or other Defendants posted vehicles for sale on Facebook Marketplace. BELL and/or other Defendants communicated with potential purchasers and, once a purchaser was identified, scheduled a time and location to meet in person to consummate the sale of the vehicle. SARANGO-HIDALGO met the purchaser at the scheduled time and location and identified herself as the wife or girlfriend of the owner of the vehicle for sale. Purchasers paid SARANGO-HIDALGO in cash for the vehicle. After the car was sold, purchasers learned that the vehicle either had been reported stolen or had a fraudulent title or an error in the title and could not be retitled in the purchaser’s name. Sometimes, the Defendants hid Apple AirTags in the vehicles they sold to track the location of the vehicles and steal them back so they could sell them again to further their profits.

4. In other instances, BELL and/or FELIX possessed and sold stolen vehicles with altered VINs and/or fraudulent titles directly to car dealerships in New Jersey.

5. Throughout and in furtherance of the conspiracy, BELL and TANKSLEY rented garages in New Jersey to possess, conceal, store and re-vin stolen vehicles prior to selling them.

6. Throughout and in furtherance of the conspiracy, BELL used a fake New Jersey driver's license bearing his own photo and the false name "David Jones." BELL also identified himself as David Jones in communications with prospective vehicle purchasers via text message and Facebook Marketplace communications.

### **Overt Acts**

7. On or about August 2, 2022, BELL sold a 2019 Dodge Charger to a car dealership in Rahway, New Jersey ("Dealership-1") for \$32,000. BELL provided Dealership-1 with photo identification, his social security number, and his cell phone number in connection with the sale. After buying the 2019 Dodge Charger from BELL, Dealership-1 sold it to a customer, who was later stopped by law enforcement on or about October 15, 2022. During the stop, law enforcement discovered that the VIN on the 2019 Dodge Charger's windshield (*i.e.* the primary VIN) did not match the VIN located on other parts of the vehicle out of plain sight (*i.e.* the private VIN), meaning the primary VIN was not the true VIN for the car.<sup>1</sup> Law enforcement subsequently learned that the 2019 Dodge Charger had been stolen in Florida in or around June 2022 and that the VIN under the windshield had been altered between the time it was stolen and the time BELL sold it to the dealership. Text messages obtained on BELL's iCloud demonstrate that on or about July 26, 2022, BELL communicated with a contact saved in his phone as "Larry" about picking up a 2019 Dodge Charger in Miami Florida, and transporting the vehicle to Rahway, New Jersey.

8. On or about September 26, 2022, BELL sold a 2020 Chevrolet Suburban to a car dealership in Edison, New Jersey ("Dealership-2") for \$34,000. On or about January 12, 2023, Dealership-2 had the car serviced and learned that the primary VIN under the windshield had been altered. The 2020 Chevrolet Suburban was rented from a car rental company in Miami Florida on or about August 22, 2020, and reported stolen in or around October 2020. The 2020 Chevrolet Suburban's VIN changed between the time it was stolen from the car

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<sup>1</sup> All car manufacturers place the primary VIN number under the windshield of the driver side. A private VIN, also known as a hidden or confidential VIN, however, is the vehicle's identification number added by the manufacture and located in a non-obvious place to help law enforcement and insurance companies verify the car's authenticity. For example, the private VIN may be stamped into the car's frame, engine, transmission, or under the spare tire. The private VIN is checked when there is a concern about VIN tampering and to prevent car cloning.

rental company and the time BELL sold it to Dealership-2. At the time BELL sold the 2020 Chevrolet Suburban to Dealership-2, the vehicle had a license plate affixed to it with the number 61DHKN.<sup>2</sup> Approximately one month later, on or about October 2022, law enforcement observed BELL driving a Dodge Hellcat bearing a Florida license plate with this same number, 61DHKN. Text messages obtained from BELL's iCloud account indicate that on or about August 24, 2022, he communicated with a contact about needing to transport a Chevy Suburban from Georgia to New York.

9. On or about October 20, 2022, BELL and FELIX attempted to sell a 2019 Jeep Grand Cherokee to a car dealership in Linden, New Jersey ("Dealership-3"). During the attempted sale, a Dealership-3 employee was suspicious of the transaction because of lien activity on the VIN, a Florida title, and an Arkansas license plate. The employee called law enforcement and was instructed to check the private VIN, which did not match the primary VIN under the windshield. Local law enforcement responded and arrested FELIX for attempting to sell a stolen vehicle. BELL fled the scene before law enforcement arrived.

10. In or around June 2023, a resident of Far Rockaway, New York ("Victim-1") contacted a seller on Facebook Marketplace about a 2021 Nissan Sentra listed for sale. The seller identified himself as "David Jones" and Victim-1 communicated with the seller via text message. The seller was using a phone number ending in 0710 (the "0710 Phone Number"). On or about June 3, 2023, Victim-1 and a family member ("Victim-2") traveled from their New York residence to a pre-arranged location in Jersey City, New Jersey to consummate the sale of the 2021 Nissan Sentra. A woman showed up at the meeting time and location and identified herself as the girlfriend of the seller. Victim-1 paid the woman \$11,000 for the 2021 Nissan Sentra. On or about June 25, 2023, law enforcement conducted a traffic stop of the 2021 Nissan Sentra, which had by that time been reported to law enforcement as stolen. Prior to the sale to Victim-1, the 2021 Nissan Sentra was purchased on or about April 21, 2023 from a car dealership in Upper Saddle River, New Jersey ("Dealership-4") by an individual using a fraudulent identification. On or about May 9, 2023, Dealership-4 reported the 2021 Nissan Sentra stolen when it was unable to contact the purchaser about upcoming payments and discovered that the documents used to purchase the 2021 Nissan Sentra were fraudulent. The 2021 Nissan Sentra was fraudulently titled between the time it was purchased from Dealership-4 on or about April 21, 2023, and when it was sold to Victim-1 on or about June 3, 2023. When law enforcement questioned Victim-2 about the 2021 Nissan Sentra, Victim-2 identified SARANGO-HIDALGO as the woman who sold the car to Victim-1 and Victim-2. A review of BELL's iCloud account revealed that BELL utilized a cell phone application called "TextMe," which allows a user to customize and/or create a duplicate phone number. The 0710 Phone Number

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<sup>2</sup> Dealership-2's records did not indicate the state of this license plate.

– which was used to communicate with Victim-1 about the sale of the 2021 Nissan Sentra – was a phone number used frequently by BELL via the TextMe application.

11. On or about July 24, 2023, an individual residing in Queens, New York (“Victim-3”) purchased a 2020 Dodge Durango from a seller on Facebook Marketplace. Victim-3 traveled from Queens, New York to a pre-arranged location in Jersey City, New Jersey to consummate the sale. A woman showed up at the meeting time and location and identified herself as the girlfriend of the seller. Victim-3 paid the woman \$20,000 for the 2020 Dodge Durango. The woman provided Victim-3 with a Pennsylvania title for the 2020 Dodge Durango, which had a primary VIN under the windshield of 1C4RDJDG3LC310204. Victim-3 drove the 2020 Dodge Durango back to Queens, New York. That night, the 2020 Dodge Durango was stolen from outside Victim-3’s residence in Queens, New York. Law enforcement conducted a search of Automated License Plate Readers (ALPRs) for Victim-3’s license plate, which revealed that the 2020 Dodge Durango traveled westbound across the Verrazano Bridge towards Staten Island at approximately 2:56:42 a.m. on or about July 26, 2023, and then across the Goethals Bridge into New Jersey at approximately 3:00 a.m. on or about July 26, 2023. ALPRs also captured a vehicle registered to BELL traveling across the Verrazano Bridge towards Staten Island, New York at approximately 2:56:43 a.m. and across the Goethals Bridge towards New Jersey at approximately 3:01:15 a.m. – mere seconds behind the 2020 Dodge Durango that had just been stolen from Victim-3’s residence. A search of BELL’s iCloud revealed that BELL communicated with Victim-3 to arrange the meeting time and location for the sale of the 2020 Dodge Durango. BELL’s iCloud also contained several documents, which appear to be templates of a VIN sticker for VIN 1C4RDJDG3LC310204 (*i.e.*, the fake VIN on the 2020 Dodge Durango at the time it was sold to Victim-3). When law enforcement questioned Victim-3 about the 2020 Dodge Durango, Victim-3 identified the woman who sold the 2020 Dodge Durango as SARANGO-HIDALGO. Law enforcement believes that it is likely that the true VIN of the 2020 Dodge Durango is 1C4RDJDG4LC394727, which is the VIN for a Dodge Durango with similar features that was stolen on or about July 17, 2023.<sup>3</sup>

12. On or about August 22, 2023, law enforcement conducted a check of vehicles registered to and operated by BELL, which included a white Dodge Durango registered to BELL, bearing Florida registration 38DEVF (the “BELL Durango”). The BELL Durango’s registration indicates that it has a VIN of 1C4RDHDG7KC743631 (the “3631 VIN”). Law enforcement discovered that a Dodge Durango with the 3631 VIN had been listed for auction in May 2023, and that it was a white Dodge Durango with two large pink stripes running down the

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<sup>3</sup> Because the 2020 Dodge Durango stolen from Victim-3 has not yet been recovered, law enforcement has been unable to confirm its true VIN.



rear of the vehicle. A search of BELL's iCloud revealed pictures of the vehicle as it was being offered for auction. On or about August 22, 2023, law enforcement discovered that TANKSLEY listed for sale on Facebook Marketplace parts from a wrecked 2019 Dodge Durango GT. TANKSLEY's Facebook Marketplace advertisement indicated that the vehicle was white with pink stripes running down the rear of the vehicle. On or about August 26, 2023, FELIX was stopped in Miami, Florida driving the BELL Durango. Law enforcement discovered that the BELL Durango was a re-VIN of a white Dodge Durango that was stolen from Kearny, New Jersey on June 8, 2023.

13. On or about July 26, 2023, SARANGO-HIDALGO sold a black Jeep Grand Cherokee to a resident of Paterson, New Jersey ("Victim-4") for \$16,000. At the time of the sale to Victim-3, the Jeep Grand Cherokee had a primary VIN under the windshield of 1C4RJFBG0LC169312 (the "9312 VIN"). On or about August 4, 2023, the Jeep Grand Cherokee was stolen from Victim-4 during the night. Victim-4's Jeep Grand Cherokee was ultimately recovered, and law enforcement found an Apple AirTag<sup>4</sup> under the hood near the battery. Law enforcement's search of BELL's iCloud revealed text messages between SARANGO-HIDALGO and BELL, in which BELL asks SARANGO-HIDALGO to pick up AirTags for him. The black Jeep Grand Cherokee sold to Victim-4 was a re-VIN; a Jeep with the 9312 VIN was listed for sale at a dealership in Pennsylvania. Law enforcement discovered that the true VIN of the Jeep Grand Cherokee sold to Victim-4 is 1C4RJFAG2LC375636 and that the vehicle was stolen out of Jersey City, New Jersey on or about July 19, 2023.

14. Since on or about February 2, 2023, BELL and TANKSLEY had been renting a three-car garage in Elizabeth, New Jersey (the "Elizabeth Garage"). On or about May 15, 2023, law enforcement obtained consent from the owner of the Elizabeth Garage to conduct a search. Among other items located within the Elizabeth Garage were three stolen vehicles; fraudulent VIN stickers; a removed/disconnected motor vehicle tracker; and blank motor vehicle bills of sale.

15. Since in or around July 2023, BELL had been renting garage space in Newark, New Jersey (the "Newark Garage"). Law enforcement has observed SARANGO-HIDALGO access the Newark Garage, and photos used by BELL to

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<sup>4</sup> An Apple AirTag is a battery-powered tracking device small enough to be placed on a keychain or in a wallet. Apple defines its function as, "Your Airtag sends out a secure Bluetooth signal that can be detected by nearby devices in the Find My network. These devices send the location of your AirTag to iCloud - then you can go to the Find My app and see it on the map. The whole process is anonymous and encrypted to protect your privacy. And it's efficient, so there's no need to worry about battery life or data usage." See Apple AirTag, *How does it work?* (<https://www.apple.com/airtag/#:~:text=Your%20AirTag%20sends%20out%20a,encrypted%20to%20protect%20your%20privacy.>)

list cars for sale on Facebook Marketplace appear to be taken adjacent to the Newark Garage. The owner of the Newark Garage provided consent for law enforcement to conduct a search. Among other items located within the Newark Garage were VIN stickers, license plates, and personal belongings of victims whose cars had been stolen.