

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

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

v.

CLAUDE ANTHONY BURNETT

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Hon. Michael A. Hammer

Mag. No. 20-10397

**CRIMINAL COMPLAINT**

I, Thomas W. Oertel, 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 Postal Inspector with the United States Postal Inspection Service and that this complaint is based on the following facts:

**SEE ATTACHMENT B**

continued on the attached page and made a part hereof.

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Thomas W. Oertel, Postal Inspector  
United States Postal Inspection Service

\*Postal Inspector Oertel attested to this  
Complaint by telephone pursuant to  
FRCP 4.1(b)(2)(A).

Sworn to and subscribed via telephone,  
This 1st day of December, 2020

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ESSEX COUNTY, NEW JERSEY  
County and State

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HONORABLE MICHAEL A. HAMMER  
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

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Signature of Judicial Officer

**ATTACHMENT A**

**Count One**  
**(Conspiracy to Commit Bank Fraud)**

From in or about February 2020 to in or about November 2020, in Morris, Essex, Somerset, and Passaic Counties, in the District of New Jersey, and elsewhere, defendant

CLAUDE ANTHONY BURNETT

knowingly and intentionally did conspire and agree with others to execute a scheme and artifice to defraud financial institutions as defined in Title 18, United States Code, Section 20, whose deposits were insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and whose accounts were insured by the National Credit Union Insurance Fund, and to obtain monies, funds, assets, and other property owned by and under the custody and control of such financial institutions, by means of materially false and fraudulent pretenses, representations, and promises, contrary to Title 18, United States Code, Section 1344.

In violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1349.

**Count Two**  
**(Conspiracy to Receive and Possess of Stolen Mail)**

From in or about February 2020 to in or about November 2020, in Morris, Essex, Somerset, and Passaic Counties, in the District of New Jersey, and elsewhere, defendant

CLAUDE ANTHONY BURNETT

knowingly and intentionally did conspire and agree with others to buy, receive, conceal, and unlawfully have in their possession, any letter, postal card, package, bag, and mail, and any article and thing contained therein, which has been so stolen, taken, embezzled, and abstracted, as herein described, knowing the same to have been stolen, taken, embezzled, and abstracted, contrary to Title 18, United States Code, Section 1708.

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

## **ATTACHMENT B**

I, Thomas W. Oertel, a Postal Inspector with the United States Postal Inspection Service, having personally participated in an investigation of the conduct of defendant CLAUDE ANTHONY BURNETT ("BURNETT"), and others, and having spoken with other law enforcement officers and individuals, have knowledge of the following facts. Because this Complaint is submitted for the limited purpose of establishing probable cause, I have not included all facts known to me concerning this investigation. The contents of documents and the statements and conversations of individuals referenced below are provided in substance and in part, unless otherwise indicated.

### **Relevant Individuals and Entities**

1. At various times relevant to this Criminal Complaint:
  - a. BURNETT was a resident of Bronx, NY.
  - b. Rental Car Company 1 was a rental car company headquartered in Boston, MA.
  - c. Individual 1 was a resident of Bronx, NY.
  - d. Victim 1 was a resident of Randolph, NJ.
  - e. Victim 2 was a resident of Towaco, NJ
  - f. Victim 3 was a resident of Denville, NJ.
  - g. Victim 4 was a resident of Basking Ridge, NJ.
  - h. Victim 5 was a resident of Wayne, NJ.
  - i. Victim 6 was a resident of Caldwell, NJ.
  - j. Victim 7 was a resident of North Caldwell, NJ.
  - k. Accountholder 1 was a resident of Grahamsville, NY and held an account at Bank 3.
    1. Accountholder 2 was a resident of Bronx, NY and held an account at Bank 4.
  - m. Accountholder 3 was a resident of Trenton, GA and held an account at Bank 6.

n. Accountholder 4 was a resident of Liberty, NY and held an account at Bank 2.

o. Accountholder 5 was a resident of Bronx, NY and held an account at Bank 9.

p. Accountholder 6 was a resident Bronx, NY and held an account at Bank 8.

q. Accountholder 7 was a resident of Bronx, NY and held and account at Bank 10.

r. Bank 1, Bank 2, Bank 3, Bank 4, Bank 5, Bank 6, Bank 7, Bank 8, Bank 9, and Bank 10 were “financial institutions” whose deposits were insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation or whose accounts were insured by the National Credit Union Insurance Fund.

### **Overview of the Conspiracy**

2. The investigation to date has shown that from at least in or about February 2020 to at least in or about November 2020, BURNETT and others conspired to steal checks from mailboxes, alter the stolen checks, and deposit the altered checks into bank accounts controlled by BURNETT and his co-conspirators.

3. To date, the investigation has identified over 140 checks with a face value of over \$600,000 that have been have been stolen, altered, and deposited in accounts controlled by BURNETT and his co-conspirators.

### **Theft of Checks**

4. Beginning on or about February 7, 2020, residents of Morris County, New Jersey began reporting sightings of a car pulling up to curbside mailboxes and stealing mail from the mailboxes.

5. Several victims were able to describe the vehicle driven by the individuals they saw stealing mail from their curbside mailboxes. Specifically, on or about March 7, 2020, a resident stated she saw a black Honda Civic pull up to her mailbox. A tall African American male wearing a black hooded sweatshirt exited the passenger side of the vehicle, ran to the mailbox, checked for outgoing mail, and then returned to the vehicle. The resident was able to view the vehicle’s license plate.

6. The vehicle with the identified license plate (“Identified Vehicle”) was a 2019 black Honda Civic registered to Rental Car Company 1. Rental Car

Company 1 records indicated that on or about March 7, 2020, Identified Vehicle was rented by an account in the name of Individual 1.

7. Rental Car Company 1 records further indicate that the Individual 1's account at Rental Car Company 1 was used to rent vehicles on at least four other dates where the rented car match the descriptions seen by residents and/or victims of curbside mailbox thefts. These include:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Vehicle Description</b>
3/7/2020	Black Honda Civic 2019
3/30/2020	Silver Subaru XV Crosstrek 2019
3/31/2020	White Honda Civic 2019
4/6/2020	White Honda Civic 2019

8. Rental Car Company 1 geo-location data records confirm a rental vehicle rented by Individual 1's account at Rental Car Company 1 was geo-located in the vicinity of approximately forty-two addresses that reported mail theft across the above four days.

9. On or about April 6, 2020, multiple residents in both Essex and Passaic Counties reported observing a white sedan, matching the description of a vehicle rented by Individual 1's account at Rental Car Company 1, stealing mail from residential curbside mailboxes. Local police reported seeing a white sedan matching the vehicle description driving at a high rate of speed in the vicinity of reports of mail thefts. The white sedan matching the vehicle description was later located abandoned by the driver and passengers. Visible inside the vehicle were several pieces of rifled mail with addresses in the areas where residents reported mail theft. Local police impounded the vehicle.

10. Several items were seized from the abandoned car, including the rifled mail. Forensic laboratory analysis results indicated the latent fingerprints of BURNETT were identified on numerous pieces of the rifled mail, a juice bottle, and a plastic glove.

### **Deposit of Altered Checks**

#### **Check from Victim 1**

1. On or about March 30, 2020, Victim 1 mailed a check, drawn on an account at Bank 1, at the curbside mailbox in front of her residence in Randolph, NJ. This check was subsequently stolen and altered. The car rented from Individual 1's account at Rental Car Company 1, listed above, was geo-located in front of Victim 1's residence on or about March 30, 2020.

2. On or about April 15, 2020, Victim 1's check was deposited via ATM into the account of Accountholder 1 at Bank 2. Video surveillance from Bank 2 shows BURNETT depositing the stolen and altered check.

#### **Check from Victim 2**

3. On or about March 30, 2020, Victim 2 mailed a check drawn on an account at Bank 3, at the curbside mailbox in front of her residence in Towaco, NJ. This check was subsequently stolen and altered. The car rented from Individual 1's account at Rental Car Company 1, listed above, was geo-located in front of Victim 2's residence on or about March 30, 2020.

4. On or about March 30, 2020, Victim 2's check was deposited via ATM into the account of Accountholder 2 at Bank 4. Video surveillance from Bank 4 shows BURNETT depositing the stolen and altered check.

#### **Check from Victim 3**

5. On or about March 30, 2020, Victim 3 mailed a check, drawn on an account at Bank 5, at the curbside mailbox in front of her residence in Denville, NJ. The check was subsequently stolen and altered. The car rented from Individual 1's account at Rental Car Company 1, listed above, was geo-located in front of Victim 3's residence on March 30, 2020.

6. On or about April 22, 2020, Victim 3's check was mobile deposited into the account of Accountholder 3 at Bank 6. Following the deposit of Victim 3's stolen check, there were two online transfers from Accountholder 3's account to BURNETT's bank account at Bank 7.

#### **Check from Victim 4**

7. On or about March 31, 2020, Victim 4 mailed a check, drawn on an account at Bank 7, at the curbside mailbox in front of her residence in Basking Ridge, NJ. The check was subsequently stolen and altered. The car rented from Individual 1's account at Rental Car Company 1, listed above, was geo-located in front of Victim 4's residence on or about March 31, 2020.

8. On or about April 15, 2020, Victim 4's check was deposited via ATM into the account of Accountholder 4 at Bank 2. Video surveillance from Bank 2 shows BURNETT depositing the stolen and altered check and subsequently withdrawing funds from Accountholder 4's account.

#### **Checks from Victim 5**

9. On or about the evening of April 5, 2020, Victim 5 mailed six checks drawn on an account at Bank 8, at the curbside mailbox in front of her

Wayne, NJ residence. These checks were subsequently stolen and altered. The car rented from Individual 1's account at Rental Car Company 1, listed above, was geo-located in front of Victim 5's residence on or about April 6, 2020.

10. On or about April 7, 2020, one of Victim 5's checks was deposited into the account of Accountholder 5 at Bank 9. Video surveillance from Bank 9 shows BURNETT depositing the stolen and altered check.

11. On or about April 7, 2020, four of Victim 5's checks were deposited into the account of Accountholder 6 at Bank 8. Video surveillance from Bank 8 shows BURNETT depositing the stolen and altered check.

#### **Check from Victim 6**

12. On or about April 6, 2020, Victim 6 mailed a check, drawn on an account at Bank 1, at the curbside mailbox in front of her residence in North Caldwell, NJ. The check was subsequently stolen and altered. The car rented from Individual 1's account at Rental Car Company 1, listed above, was geo-located in front of Victim 6's residence on or about April 6, 2020.

13. On or about April 6, 2020, Victim 6's check was deposited via ATM into the account of Accountholder 7 at Bank 10. Video surveillance from Bank 10 shows BURNETT depositing the stolen and altered check.

#### **Check from Victim 7**

14. On or about April 6, 2020, Victim 7 mailed a check, drawn on an account at Bank 3 at the curbside mailbox in front of his residence in North Caldwell, NJ. The check was subsequently stolen and altered. The car rented from Individual 1's account at Rental Car Company 1, listed above, was geo-located in front of Victim 7's residence on or about April 6, 2020.

15. On or about April 7, 2020, Victim 7's check was deposited via ATM into the account of Accountholder 6 at Bank 8. Video surveillance from Bank 8 shows BURNETT depositing the stolen and altered check.