

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

for the

District of Rhode Island

United States of America)

v.)

Cortavious Benford (YOB:1994))

Case No. 1:21MJ09PAS

Defendant(s)

CRIMINAL COMPLAINT

I, the complainant in this case, state that the following is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

On or about the date(s) of October 2018 - February 2021 in the county of in the District of Rhode Island, the defendant(s) violated:

Table with 2 columns: Code Section, Offense Description. Row 1: 18 U.S.C. § 1344 and 18 U.S.C. § 1349, Bank Fraud and Conspiracy to Commit Bank Fraud

This criminal complaint is based on these facts:

See the attached Affidavit of Secret Service Task Force Officer, Lieutenant Matthew Reardon of the Medway Police Department.

Continued on the attached sheet.

Matthew Reardon signature

MATTHEW REARDON Lieutenant - Medway Police

Complainant's signature

TFO Matthew Reardon - Medway Police

Printed name and title

Sworn telephonically and signed electronically

Sworn to before me and signed in my presence.

Date: February 5, 2021

Patricia A. Sullivan signature

Judge's signature

City and state: Providence, Rhode Island

Patricia A. Sullivan, U.S. Magistrate Judge

Printed name and title

AFFIDAVIT IN SUPPORT OF
CRIMINAL COMPLAINT

I, Matthew D. Reardon, being duly sworn, do hereby depose and state the following:

BACKGROUND

1. I am a Police Officer with the Medway, Massachusetts Police Department. I am also a Task Force Officer with the United States Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security and as such I have been sworn as a deputy U.S. Marshal. I am currently assigned as a Lieutenant in charge of the Detective Division for the Medway Police Department. I have been employed as a Police Officer for the Town of Medway for over 25 years. Prior to being promoted to Lieutenant Detective, I was a Detective Sergeant in the Detective Bureau for 4 years and a detective for 8 years. I graduated from Western New England College with a Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice and from Anna Maria College with a Master's Degree in Public Administration - Criminal Justice.

2. As set forth in this affidavit, probable cause exists to believe that from in or about October 2018 through February 5, 2021 in the Districts of Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maine and elsewhere, defendants AUSTIN WEAVER ("WEAVER"), CORTAVIOUS BENFORD ("BENFORD"), JALEN STANFORD ("STANFORD") and MICHAEL WILLIAMS ("WILLIAMS") conspired with one another and with others known and unknown to the United States to knowingly execute and attempt to execute a scheme to defraud financial institutions and to obtain money, funds and property owned by or under the control of financial institutions, by

means of false and fraudulent pretenses representations and promises, contrary to 18 U.S.C. § 1344, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1349. Specifically, there is probable cause to believe that WEAVER, BENFORD, SANDFORD, and WILLIAMS orchestrated a long running bank fraud conspiracy in which homeless and transient individuals were recruited to cash counterfeit business checks in banks throughout the region, causing hundred of thousands of dollars in losses.

3. This affidavit is offered for the sole purpose of establishing probable cause for a criminal complaint charging WEAVER, BENFORD, SANDFORD, and WILLIAMS with violating 18 U.S.C. § 1349, and does not contain all the facts and circumstances of which I am aware related to this investigation.

Bank Fraud Activity in RI and MA from October 2018-February 2019

4. In the fall of 2018, numerous towns in South Eastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island began to see repeated instances of fraudulent business checks being passed at various banks. The fraudulent checks had the correct victim business names and addresses, the correct routing and account numbers and the check numbers were consistent with the current check numbers being used. All of the fraudulent checks were computer generated and appeared to be printed on commercially available check stock for a printer. The fraudulent checks largely had the correct company logo on the checks, indicating they were likely scanned and reproduced.

5. All of the fraudulent checks described above were made payable to individuals and were predominately being cashed by individuals from Rhode Island. Many of the individuals who were cashing these fraudulent checks were found to be

using their own Rhode Island Identification cards as opposed to driver's licenses. Many of these individuals were later found to be either homeless or living in transient housing shelters or similar facilities.

6. On October 31, 2018, the Charles River Bank in Medway, Massachusetts filed a report with the Medway Police Department regarding several fraudulent business checks that were cashed against one of their business customer's accounts. Two individuals from Rhode Island had gone to all three of the Charles River Bank branch locations in Medway, Bellingham and Mendon on consecutive days to cash these checks. The fraudulent checks passed against this victim business account totaled over \$11,000.

7. On November 1, 2018, the Medway branch of the Charles River Bank contacted the Medway Police Department reporting that an individual was currently in the bank trying to cash a fraudulent check against the same business account. The Medway Police Department responded and subsequently arrested R.S., after he attempted to cash a fraudulent business check.

8. R.S. informed law enforcement that he was approached outside of the Amos House Shelter on Pine Street in Providence by a black male, in what R.S. described a small white sedan with New York license plates. R.S. stated that this individual approached him on the side of the road and asked R.S. if he had an ID and if he wanted to "work" for the day. R.S. stated he understood the work was going to be to cash a bogus check. R.S. stated said he knew that the individual who approached his

is frequently with a second black male and that these two individuals frequently work together offering individuals from or around the shelter money to cash checks.

9. R.S. further stated that the second male later joined them and that the two individuals drove him directly to Medway, Massachusetts. R.S. further stated that when they arrived in Medway, the driver parked the vehicle across the street from the bank and he had to walk to the bank. The check R.S. attempted to cash was made payable to him for \$2,400 and he was told he would get \$100 for each check he cashed. R.S. provided physical descriptions of the two individuals who recruited him, gave him counterfeit checks and drove him to the bank. Those descriptions match the physical appearance of defendants WEAVER and BENFORD.

10. Charles River Bank's security video showed R.S. approaching the bank on foot and ultimately coming from a vehicle parked at the One Stop Convenience Store across the street. This vehicle could be seen travelling east on Main Street before parking at One Stop. This affiant was able to locate surveillance video from an area business a short distance away along Main Street which showed a white Chevy sedan with New York license plates travelling east seconds before it can be seen on the Charles River Bank video. From this video, the vehicle was identified as having New York Registration HTU-4363. A check of this registration through the New York RMV showed that it was owed by Avis Rental Car Company. Avis informed law enforcement that this vehicle was currently being rented by C.L.J. of 1108 Westminster St, Apt 116, Providence, RI.

11. On December 19, 2018, the Franklin Police Department was called to the Citizens Bank branch on East Central Street in Franklin, MA for a report of a male subject with a Rhode Island identification card attempting to cash a fraudulent business check. The undersigned responded and met Franklin PD officers who advised that D.E. had attempted to cash a fraudulent business check from a local business. The fraudulent check D.E. had tried to cash was printed on the same check stock used in Medway, described above. D.E. was found to be homeless from Providence, RI.

12. D.E. advised law enforcement that he was approached inside of Amos House in Providence by two black males. D.E. provided the same physical description of the two black males that R.S. had previously provided, matching the appearances of defendants WEAVER and BENFORD. D.E. stated that after being approached and offered money to cash checks, the two suspects took him to the CVS store on Broad Street in Providence.

13. D.E. further stated that the two individuals drove him to the Citizens Bank branch in Franklin, Massachusetts and parked on the other side of the lot and he had to walk a distance to the bank. D.E. stated that the vehicle the suspects had driven him in was a small silver colored sedan.

14. After speaking with D.E., this affiant contacted Avis and learned that C.L.J. had returned her previous rental, the white Chevy Malibu, on November 24, 2018. Avis further advised that C.L.J. was currently renting a silver Mazda 3 sedan with Pennsylvania registration KRA-2901 which she had picked up on December 17, 2018.

This vehicle make, model and color match the description of the vehicle described by D.E.

15. The Franklin Police officers who had responded to Citizens Bank reported that this was at least the third fraudulent check cashing incident they had responded to in recent days. Franklin PD had also arrested a subject, J.F., on December 14, 2018 at the Citizens Bank inside of Stop & Shop for attempting to pass a fraudulent business check. The victim business for this check was Anchor Animal Hospital from North Dartmouth, MA. Fraudulent Anchor Animal Hospital checks had been used 7 other times at various Citizens Bank locations by a total of three different individuals, all using Rhode Island identifications.

16. This affiant further learned during the same week that the Rehoboth, MA and Cumberland, R.I. Police Departments were investigating instance of fraudulent business checks being cashed at various banks by persons with Rhode Island identification cards. In both of these instances, surveillance video captured the vehicle used to transport the check cashers showed a small silver sedan which was consistent with the make, model and feature of the Mazda 3 which was actively rented by C.L.J. The affiant later saw a copy of the checks and recognized them as from the same check stock used in previous incidents.

17. On January 2, 2019, J.K. was arrested by the Rockland, MA Police Department for attempting to pass a fraudulent business check. The affiant later saw a copy of the check and recognized it as the same check stock used in previous incidents. J.K. advised law enforcement that he was picked up outside of a liquor store in Central

Falls, RI and offered \$100 to cash a check. J.K. described being picked and driven to the bank by two black males in a small silver sedan. J.K. also told officers that on the way to the bank, the vehicle they were in had been stopped by a State Trooper. A check of PA Registration KRA-2901, the rental vehicle rented by C.L.J., showed that it had been queried by Trooper Kenneth Proulx of the Massachusetts State Police at 10:25 a.m. on January 2, 2019.

18. Tpr. Proulx stopped the Mazda 3 rented by C.L.J. and issued the operator a citation for motor vehicle offenses and operating with an expired Georgia driver's license. Tpr. Proulx reported the operator of the vehicle to be defendant BENFORD and that the individual in the front passenger seat was defendant WEAVER. Tpr. Proulx noted that there was a back seat passenger in the vehicle but that he did not have interaction with that individual.

19. Later that same day, at approximately 3:30 p.m. on January 2, 2019, the Blackstone Police Department arrested S.S. for attempting to cash a fraudulent business check at the Dean Bank in Blackstone, MA. S.S. informed law enforcement that he had been picked up at a McDonalds restaurant by two black males in a small silver vehicle. S.S. said that they took a photo of his ID then drove to a CVS down the street from where he was picked up. S.S. further stated that he had previously been approached by a tall black male at the McDonalds restaurant on Broad Street in Providence, RI near the shelters. S.S. stated that he knew this male subject by the name of "Westwood." S.S. stated that "Westwood" was the driver when he was picked up. S.S. provided a physical description of the person he knew as Westwood as a tall black male about 6' 4"

about 260 pounds with green eyes and a shaved head. This description is consistent with that of WEAVER. S.S. said that WEAVER (known to S.S. as Westwood) gave him a phone number to reach him at when he wanted to work.

20. Video surveillance recovered from a nearby business showed what appeared to be the same Mazda 3 with Pennsylvania registration in the parking lot at the time S.S. was dropped off near the bank.

21. S.S. provided law enforcement with a copy of a note he had written down with Westwood's (believed to be WEAVER) phone number on it. The note had the phone number 401-206-4112 written on it with, "Call checks," "Wed 3rd," and "Westwood" on it.

22. The affiant was able to determine that the above phone number is registered as in use with Pinger. I know based on my training and experience that Pinger is a voice over IP service that is available for free via an application on a cell phone or tablet. Records received from Pinger show a limited number of calls and text messages to and from this number. Several of the numbers which communicated with this target number were associated with various persons who had been identified as cashing fraudulent business checks. In addition to call detail records, Pinger provided a list of IP addresses which were used to log into this Pinger account. The IP logs provided by Pinger showed numerous logins into this account on January 2 & 3, 2019 from an address assigned to a Verizon FIOS customer in Providence, RI.

23. Verizon's records indicated the IP address had been assigned to the FIOS customer at 190 Gallup St, Providence, RI. Verizon's records indicated the customer

assigned this IP address at this location was G.S. Investigators believe that G.S. is the mother of defendants STANFORD and WILLIAMS.

24. On January 3, 2019, this affiant learned that the Bridgewater and Lakeville, MA area had seen numerous instances of check fraud in late November and early December 2018. One of these instances of check fraud investigated by Bridgewater PD identified a rental car rented by STANFORD, DOB: XX/XX/1993 from Atlanta, GA that was used in a check fraud incident on November 26, 2018. Bridgewater PD's investigation identified this vehicle, a grey Buick Regal sedan, pulling into a Cumberland Farms across the street from the victim bank. The female subject who entered the bank to cash the fraudulent check can be seen exiting this vehicle and walking to the bank. Video from Cumberland Farms showed this Buick had Florida Registration JKH-X75. Cumberland Farms video also showed two black males exiting this vehicle and entering the Cumberland Farms store.

25. A check of Florida Registration JKH-X75 shows this vehicle is registered to Sixt Rental Car Company. Sixt Rental Car Company reported that his vehicle was rented from the Georgian Terrance Hotel in Atlanta, GA by STANFORD on November 24, 2018 and returned on November 30, 2019.

26. Continued investigation developed a second address listed for C.L.J. which was 839 Broad Street, #2, Providence, RI. This apartment building is approximately three city blocks from the CVS where many of the check cashers describe being taken. Special Agents and detectives conducting surveillance on January 14, 2019

observed a silver Mazda 3 with Pennsylvania registration KRA-2901 parked in the parking lot of 839 Broad Street, Providence.

27. On February 25, 2019, the Raynham Police Department arrested B.A. for attempting to cash a fraudulent business check at a bank in Raynham, MA. In an interview with police, B.A. stated that he was approached by who he described as a skinny black male who used the name, "Chris", while B.A. was in line for breakfast at Amos House. B.A. stated that he was picked up from a Burger King restaurant on Broad Street by "Chris" and another black male and was then driven to the area of CVS on Broad St. B.A. stated that he was driven to Raynham, Massachusetts to cash a check. B.A. said that "Chris" was the passenger in the vehicle. Abrahamson described being driven in a silver vehicle. Abrahamson provided a phone number he used to communicate with the suspects as 401-217-5891.

28. On February 26, 2019, the North Attleboro Police Department arrested P.S. for attempting to cash a fraudulent check. P.S. informed law enforcement that he met a friend at Kennedy Plaza in Providence who had just come back from cashing checks. The friend told him to text a number, 401-217-5891, if he wanted to go work. The friend told him he would get paid up to \$400 for cashing checks. P.S. texted his photo ID to the number provided. The suspects responded to P.S. and told him to meet at the 7-11 by Kennedy Plaza in a half hour. The number used to communicate with the suspects was the same number provided by B.A, the Raynham check casher described above. P.S. further stated that he was picked up by two skinny black males in a Silver Ford Edge or Escape type SUV with Texas plates at the 7-11 about 30 minutes later. P.S.

stated that he was driven to North Attleboro, MA where he was instructed to cash the check.

29. On February 27, 2019, I along with multiple USSS Agents and local law enforcement officers conducted a surveillance of 190 Gallup Street, Providence. We observed a silver Ford Edge automobile with Texas registration plates in the driveway of the residence, a silver Bentley with Florida temporary registration parked directly out front of the residence and a black Mercedes sports car with unknown registration parked directly in front of the Bentley. Officers observed two black males, one wearing a red coat and one wearing a gray coat (identified as STANFORD), exit the location and enter the Bentley SUV bearing FL reg. CJH7387, and proceed to move it out from blocking the driveway. At this time, a Toyota RAV4 bearing TX reg. KSJ1151 stopped in front of the residence for a short time and its occupants appeared to speak with STANFORD and then drove off at a high rate of speed towards Broad St, and then towards the area that homeless individuals had been picked up in the past. At approximately 9:50 a.m., agents and officers observed the same two black males (STANFORD and an unknown individual) drive the Silver Ford Edge bearing TX reg. JWC6920 outside the McDonalds restaurant on Broad St. in Providence. This area in Providence is the same area that the check cashers described above have indicated they were picked up from. In the area of the McDonalds is the Amos House for the homeless and the Salvation Army, as well as a Dunkin Donuts and a Burger King, and this area has a large homeless population. While in the McDonald's parking lot, STANFORD and the other occupant of the Ford Edge picked up an apparent homeless individual

wearing a tan jacket, later identified as R.R., and then dropped R.R. off a short time later near the 7/11 convenience store further along Broad St. STANFORD then continued to drive around the area on Broad Street and then drove back to 190 Gallup Street and parked outside. STANFORD then exited the vehicle and went inside 190 Gallup Street. While STANFORD was inside, the Silver Toyota RAV4 with TX plates from earlier also pulled up to the location and parked. STANFORD exited 190 Gallup Street a short time later and handed something to the individuals in the Toyota RAV4. STANFORD then entered the Ford vehicle by getting into the driver's seat and drove.

30. STANFORD then drove the Ford vehicle to the Burger King restaurant on Broad Street next to the 7/11 convenience store where R.R. was standing outside. The Ford pulled directly in front of R.R. and he got into the vehicle and then the Ford left the Burger King parking lot towards I95N.

31. The Ford Edge being driven by STANFORD was then observed entering the on ramp to I95 North going towards the Massachusetts border and finally exited at exit 5 in Attleboro, MA. The vehicle then approached the area of the Bristol County Savings Bank at 130 Pleasant Street. The Ford Edge pulled into the Dunkin Donuts parking lot, which is directly next to the bank where they appeared to drop off the cashier. The Edge then left Dunkin Donuts lot and pulled into the parking lot of Dollar General across the street from the bank. R.R. exited the right rear door of the vehicle and then proceeded to walk in the direction of the bank. R.R. then entered the bank and agents and officers followed him inside to observe the transaction. R.R. approached the teller and attempted to cash a check from New Hope INC made out to him. The teller

called the Victim Company, New Hope INC, and confirmed that they had never issued a check to R.R., and stated that the specific check number was supposed to go to another business. After questioning R.R., he appeared nervous and started looking outside the bank back towards the vehicle. R.R. also used his cell phone, which he later admitted to texting the handlers in the car that he didn't know what to do. Attleboro PD was notified and came to arrest R.R. After R.R. was in the bank for approaching ten minutes, the two individuals in the Ford Edge left the parking lot at Dollar General and drove in the direction of I95 South. Once the Ford Edge had reached the CVS on Broad Street, Providence, STANFORD exited the driver's seat of the vehicle and removed what is believed to be R.R.'s belongings from the back seat and threw them into a nearby dumpster.

32. During an interview with police, R.R. explained that he was approached by a black male and asked if he wanted to make some money. R.R. agreed, stating that he is homeless and needs money. R.R. was then instructed to meet at the Burger King on Broad Street in Providence and wait to be picked up there. He also gave his license to the black male so they could use his information. He said that he was instructed to go into the Bristol County Savings bank and cash the check that they had given him, and to text them on 401-314-8844 when he was finished and they would come back and pick him up. R.R. stated that when he knew that the check was not going to pass, he texted the black male and told him that the bank had notified law enforcement and asked what he should do. This was the point at which STANFORD and his associate fled the scene.

33. On March 1, 2019, surveillance of 190 Gallup Street was conducted by agents from the USSS and local law enforcement officers. While on surveillance, agents and officers noticed the vehicle from 2/27/19 was missing. At this time, Hertz Rental Car Company notified law enforcement that the Ford Edge with Texas Registration, JWC-6920, was rented by STANFORD. Hertz indicated that this vehicle had been rented from their location at the Atlanta Airport on February 16, 2019 and it was due to be returned on February 28, 2019.

Bank Fraud Activity in Maine From Late 2019-2020

34. Detective Steve Borst of the Kennebunk Police Department in Kennebunk, Maine has advised that in late 2019, Portland, Maine and surrounding communities began seeing much of the same check fraud activity as described above. Det. Borst stated that several check cashers who had been arrested reported that they were being picked up in the area of a homeless shelter in Portland and offered cash to cash checks if they had a valid ID. Det. Borst said the subjects picking the cashers up were always described as black males. Det. Borst said many of the suspects would take the cashers to what they described as "Auntie's House" where the suspects would park and one of the suspects would walk away for a short period of time. Once the suspect returned to the vehicle, they would then take the cashier to various banks. Det. Borst reported this activity was occurring on a regular basis from late October 2019 through the beginning of March 2020.

35. The forged check cashing activity in southern Maine stalled around the end of 2019 but picked back up around the New Year, specifically on January 6, 2020, in

Kennebunk, Maine. During one such incident, a silver Dodge Durango was identified as being used by the Georgia principals. Surveillance footage showed at least two unidentified black males occupying the Durango on Rt. 1, Kennebunk. In the early morning hours of January 8, 2020, the silver Dodge Durango was located at the Howard Johnsons by South Portland Police. Shortly thereafter the Durango departed and was stopped by police. The lone occupant/operator, defendant MICHAEL WILLIAMS, was arrested on an NCIC warrant out of Oklahoma for check fraud/forgery.

36. During a search of the vehicle WILLIAMS was operating, officers found a portion of a check on the floorboard behind the driver's seat. Also, during the stop, WILLIAMS told officers that he was staying at the Howard Johnsons with his brother but would not provide any further information. Subsequent investigation at the Howard Johnson's revealed that JALEN STANFORD, an associate of MICHAEL WILLIAMS, had rented room #206. (Later, it was determined that MICHAEL WILLIAMS and JALEN STANFORD are half-brothers).

37. Maine detectives reported that although it was obvious that the room was occupied by at least one male, no one would open the door for police. After check-out time had passed, law enforcement accompanied housekeeping/management to the room. It was now vacant but the occupants had abandoned two (2) printers inside the room. USSS took possession of the printers and surveillance showed that the occupants, three (3) unknown black males, departed the room at approximately 04:50hrs.

38. The Scarborough Maine Police Department seized two separate fraudulent checks which were passed at banks in their community, the first on October 30, 2020 and the second on December 1, 2020. Both checks were submitted to the crime lab for latent print processing. Latent prints found on both checks have been identified as belonging to defendant WILLIAMS.

Recent Bank Fraud Activity in Rhode Island and Massachusetts

39. On January 19, 2021, the Wrentham Police Department received information that there were reports from Norfolk, MA and Walpole, MA that suspects were driving around going through mailboxes in those communities. While on patrol overnight, Wrentham police officers recovered discarded mail in the roadway on Dedham St. Some of the recovered mail was from Lake Pearl Wrentham on Creek St. and Percy Masonry and Gartman Arms which are both located on Washington Street in Wrentham, MA.

40. The Gartman Arms office manager reported that she had placed a bill with a check in the mailbox in front of the business around 5:00PM on Saturday, January 16th and the flag was up on the mailbox. The office manager accessed the business bank account and noticed that two checks were cashed from the account on this day. The first check which was cashed was check number 1642 in the amount of \$2974.40 and the second was check number 1693 in the amount of \$2874.40. Check number 1642 was the check number that was in the mailbox and the original amount was for \$74.40. Check number 1963 had not been used yet. Neither check had been written by the company.

41. Law enforcement subsequently reviewed a copy of video surveillance from outside of Gartman Arms on January 18, 2021. At 10:59:23PM, a gray colored SUV can be seen traveling on Washington St. north bound. The SUV slows, put its left directional on and takes a left into the drive of Gartman Arms. The SUV passes by the surveillance camera and then stops at the opposite end of the driveway coming to a stop just beyond where the mailbox is. The mail is not in camera view. At 10:59:43PM, the occupant from the front passenger seat opened up the door, stepped outside for a second and got back in. The vehicle remains parked for several minutes with no activity. At 11:04.10PM, the occupant from the front passenger seat exits the vehicle and runs toward the mailbox. The suspect returns seconds later and it appears the suspect has something in his hands.

42. Wrentham Cooperative Bank provided police with copies of the two Gartman Arms checks and surveillance photos from the bank. It was determined that the checks were counterfeit. The video surveillance stills showed the suspect who cashed the checks was short and thin in stature and wore a flat brimmed baseball hat. Both checks were made out to R.Z. of Pawtucket, RI. One check was cashed at the Wrentham Cooperative Bank branch located at 1005 South St. at 11:15AM and the second check was cashed at the Wrentham Cooperative Bank branch at 102 South St. at 11:38AM. The suspect that cashed the checks presented a Rhode Island photo ID bearing the same identifiers on the checks, R.Z. Both checks were cashed. R.Z. is currently on Federal Probation for bank robbery.

43. On January 20, 2021 at 12:03PM, the Wrentham Police Department arrested B.P. of Providence, RI after he attempted to cash two checks drawn from the same Gartman Arms bank account at Wrentham Cooperative Bank. One check was for \$2774.40 and the other \$2874.40. It was reported that B.P. was unsuccessful in cashing a check at the 1005 South St. branch and showed up at the 102 South St. branch and was trying to cash a second check. B.P. advised law enforcement that he was approached by two men near a homeless shelter called Crossroads near Broad St. in Providence around 9:30AM. The suspects asked him if he had an ID and if he wanted to cash some checks with his name on them. When B.P. got to the suspects' vehicle, the checks were inside the glove compartment. One of the suspects then gave him a ride to Wrentham in what B.P. described as a large gray van. When B.P. arrived in Wrentham, the driver parked at the Mobil gas station next to the Wrentham Cooperative Bank. After unsuccessfully attempting to cash the check, B.P. was picked up and was driven to the Wrentham Cooperative bank branch at 102 South St. where he was later arrested.

44. After reviewing surveillance images of the suspect vehicle from the Gartman Arms mail theft and after speaking with other area detectives, it was determined that the suspect vehicle from Gartman Arms was a newer model Nissan Armada. The location where B.P. was dropped off was the Mobil gas station across from the Wrentham Outlets. Video surveillance system at the Wrentham Outlets identified a a gray Nissan Armada, with Maryland registration 5EK6713, enter the shopping center at 11:23:34AM and exit at 11:25:10AM. According to motor vehicle records, the 2020 Nissan Armada was registered to EAN Holdings, LLC (Enterprise).

45. Enterprise advised law enforcement that the Nissan Armada which was seen in the area of the Wrentham Cooperative Bank around the same time B.P. attempted to cash the first check was rented out of Logan Airport on January 18, 2021 by defendant WILLIAMS. WILLIAMS used a GA driver's license number of 056947550. At the time of rental, two telephone numbers were provided, 407-416-1320 & 401-996-1264. In addition to the current rental, Enterprise also provided information on Williams' previous rentals, all rented from the same location and were as follows: (i) Kia Optima - dark gray - MI reg ECH8087 rented on 11/11/20 and returned on 11/12/20, (ii) Hyundai Sonata-dark gray - RI reg 1AH149 rented on 12/08/20 and returned on 12/20/20, and (iii) Chevy Malibu - blue - GA reg CMP1045 rented on 01/06/21 and returned on 01/08/21

46. The Foxborough, MA Police Department arrested J.P. on January 8, 2021 around 12:37PM after he attempted to cash a check for \$3,870 at the Rockland Trust Bank located at 1 Mechanic St. in Foxboro. The check had been counterfeited from a bank account belonging to the Milford Housing Authority. J.P. was interviewed by the arresting officers and he disclosed the following: earlier in the day, J.P. was approached by two men in a dark blue colored what he described as being an Acura four door sedan with Georgia plates near Kennedy Plaza in Providence, RI. These two men asked J.P. if he wanted to make a couple hundred dollars. J.P. was driven to a CVS where the vehicle he was in parked in the lot. This CVS was subsequently identified as being located at 960 Broad St. in Providence. J.P. told police that one of the men in the car exited and walked to a row of houses and went inside a beige two story house. This

male exited a period of time later and this person had three checks bearing his name. These checks would be later found to be drawn from a Citizens Bank account belonging to Ecuamerica Construction. Prior to being arrested in Foxboro, J.P. successfully cashed two checks (\$2,990.10 and \$3,250.10) in Plainville and North Attleboro.

47. On January 22, 2021, R.Z. was arrested in Acton after he tried cashing a counterfeit check. At 2:50PM on that date, R.Z. was attempting to cash a check for \$2,680.10 at Enterprise Bank. The check was from an account belonging to Kevin Tomany MD PC from Chelmsford.

48. On January 24, 2021, R.Z. was interviewed by law enforcement. He stated that in the morning of January 19, 2021, he was at Kennedy Plaza in Providence. Two males in an SUV asked if he wanted to "get on the payroll". R.Z. later said this SUV had Maryland license plates. R.Z. also said that the two males would go to the area asking people if they had IDs and if they wanted to cash checks. One of the suspects took a photo of R.Z.'s ID card with a cell phone. R.Z. got in the SUV where they traveled to a CVS which he described as being in the area of 960 Broad St. in Providence. R.Z. stated that one of the males got out of the vehicle and went to a house across the street (onto Colfax Street) to get the checks. Colfax Street runs parallel with Gallup Street and the rear of 190 Gallup Street can be seen from the CVS parking lot while looking across Colfax Street. When the suspect got back to the car, he had five checks printed with R.Z.'s name on them. R.Z. was given a ride to Wrentham where the first location he went to was the Wrentham Cooperative Bank across from the Wrentham Outlets. The suspects parked at the Mobil gas station. After cashing the first

check, he got back into the SUV and he was driven to the second location in Wrentham center where he cashed the second check. With regard to the check in Acton, he had been contacted by the suspects in the morning and R.Z. was subsequently picked up and driven to Acton. The vehicle used to bring him to Acton was the same SUV as R.Z. had been in during the Wrentham trip. R.Z. showed the detectives texts messages and phone logs from his cell phone showing the phone number of one of the suspects with whom he had communicated. The telephone number was 401-285-4992.

49. On January 22, 2021, surveillance was conducted at 190 Gallup Street in Providence. At approximately 11:00PM, an officer observed a white Volkswagen Jetta bearing New Jersey registration A86NCZ parked in the driveway of this location. The officer also saw parked on the street in front of the house a black Mitsubishi bearing Florida registration. The Jetta was registered to Enterprise.

50. According to records from Enterprise, defendant MICHAEL WILLIAMS had returned the Nissan Armada on Friday, January 22, 2021 around 7:30PM to the Enterprise location at TF Green Airport and swapped it out for the Jetta with New Jersey registration A86NCZ.

51. On January 26, 2021 at 10:15AM, a detective did drive by surveillance at 190 Gallup Street, Providence. At that time, he reported a 2020 Nissan Altima bearing Texas registration MVN7205 was parked in the driveway. Enterprise advised law enforcement that the vehicle had been rented on January 25, 2021 from Logan Airport at 7:00PM by D.Q., from Riverdale, GA.

52. On January 28, 2021, several detectives and Secret Service agents established surveillance at the CVS at 960 Broad St and at 190 Gallup Street. At approximately 7:30 a.m., when surveillance began, the Volkswagen Jetta bearing NJ A86NCZ was parked in the street near 190 Gallup Street and the Nissan Altima bearing TX MVN7025 was parked in the driveway.

53. At approximately 9:21AM on January 28, 2021, two black males were observed exiting 190 Gallup Street and getting into the Nissan Altima parked in the driveway. One suspect was tall, had a muscular build and was wearing a gray sweatshirt and a black hat. This individual is believed to be defendant WEAVER. Detectives were able to see a second male get into the car but were not able to determine what he was wearing.

54. At approximately 9:31AM on January 28, 2021, a third male entered the Nissan and the Nissan left and WEAVER, who was driving, took a left onto Broad St. After traveling a short period of time, the Nissan abruptly stopped and the vehicle pulled over to what appeared to be a random person who was walking at the intersection of Pine St. and Broad St. The passengers in the Altima appeared to have engaged this person for a short period of time and then drove off.

55. At approximately 9:40AM on January 28, 2021, the Volkswagen was observed traveling from the Gallup St. area on Broad St. There was a single black male driver wearing a gray hooded sweatshirt who had on a blue surgical mask. This individual is believed to be defendant BENFORD. As surveillance followed, BENFORD stopped the Jetta several times to speak with who appeared to be random people who

were walking on the sidewalks. BENFORD would make sudden u-turns. The Jetta stopped at McDonald's on Broad St. and BENFORD spoke to a person and then continued into the city and continued to stop and speak with random people at various points. The Jetta went to the Kennedy Plaza area of Providence where BENFORD exited the vehicle and was observed speaking with numerous individuals. After approaching several individuals in the area of the Kennedy Plaza, BENFORD returned to the Jetta and proceeded to Pawtucket, RI.

56. At approximately 10:12AM on January 28, 2021, Det/Sgt Meincke observed the operator of the Jetta pull in and park at a 7/11 in Pawtucket and began engaging random people in conversation.

57. At approximately 10:30AM on January 28, 2021, Det. O'Connell observed the Nissan pull into the parking lot at Central Liquors which is located at 930 Broad St. (next to CVS). WEAVER, who was seen exiting 190 Gallup Street in the grey sweatshirt and black hat, was a passenger in the Altima at this point. WEAVER and a second black male who was wearing all black clothing exited the vehicle.

58. At this point, detectives were able to photograph both subjects. A third black male remained in the vehicle was observed to be wearing dark clothing with a gray hooded sweatshirt underneath a dark jacket with a white logo on the upper left chest which appears to be a Northface jacket. A fourth occupant was seated in the back seat who was later identified as C.G. WEAVER and another individual walked on Broad St. then took a left onto Gallup St.

59. At approximately 10:44AM, the Nissan Altima left the liquor store and proceeded through the city to Route 95 north. Surveillance was able to continuously follow the Altima as it traveled directly to the Franklin Village Plaza in Franklin. Inside the Nissan, the individual wearing the Northface jacket drove, WEAVER was the front seat passenger, and C.G. was in the back seat.

60. At approximately 11:20AM, the Nissan Altima parked in the parking lot of Stop & Shop and C.G. exited the vehicle and walked into the store. Det. O'Connell went on foot where he observed C.G. at the rest rooms. After exiting the rest room, C.G. walked back to the parking lot and had a conversation with the passenger of the Altima, WEAVER. C.G. then walked from Stop & Shop to the Middlesex Savings Bank in the same plaza and entered the bank.

61. Approximately 11:35AM on January 28, 2021, C.G. exited the bank and subsequently entered back into the Nissan Altima which traveled toward Franklin center. The Altima stopped in downtown Franklin and C.G. exited the vehicle by Rockland Trust at 58 Main St. The Nissan Altima parked in several locations in the area of, but distant from, the bank before it finally parked on Main Street in Franklin.

62. Det. O'Connell placed a call to Rockland Trust Security to inform her they had a female at the Main St. branch who was trying to cash what was believed to be a counterfeit check.

63. A short time later, the bank called the Franklin Police Department who responded to the bank and encountered the check casher. Upon seeing the police

responding to the bank, the Nissan Altima left the area and travelled through Franklin directly to the highway and proceeds to return directly to 190 Gallup Street, Providence.

64. On Saturday January 30, 2021, at approximately 8:32 a.m., Det. O'Connell observed the Jetta backed into the driveway of 190 Gallup Street. He also observed a different Nissan Altima parked in front of the location running. This vehicle had Pennsylvania registration LHH-3841 and will hereafter be referred to as "Altima 2". This vehicle was registered to Avis and was currently being rented by J.W. of 869 River St, Providence, RI.

65. On Monday, February 1, 2021, a team of detectives and agents from the United States Secret Service conducted surveillance at 190 Gallup Street, Providence. Surveillance began at approximately 8 a.m. at which time the Jetta rented by WILLIAMS was parked in the driveway and Altima 2 was parked in the roadway.

66. At approximately 8:15 a.m. on February 1, 2021, a white Dodge Van with Connecticut Commercial Registration AU36769 pulled up in front of the location. Two occupants exited 190 Gallup Street, one wearing a grey sweatshirt with a thin black strip across the chest, and the other wearing a black trench coat and Timberland work boots, and approached the two occupants of the van. Detectives recognized the subject with the grey sweatshirt with a thin black strip on the chest as WEAVER. In fact, the sweatshirt WEAVER was wearing at this point appeared to be the same sweatshirt he was wearing under the black coat on the 28th.

67. The driver of the van was a thin black male. The passenger in the van was a black female wearing pants with a floral design on them. The occupants of the van

opened the back doors of the van and WEAVER and another individual met with the occupants of the van at the rear of the van. At one point, WEAVER was seen stepping into the rear of the van and talking with the driver and passenger of the van. The group met for approximately 25 minutes then left with the same two occupants in the van.

68. At approximately 9:00AM on February 1, 2021, a thin black male exited 190 Gallup Street wearing a black jacket over a gray hooded sweatshirt and gets into the Jetta and drives to Burger King located at 280 Broad St. in Providence. Detectives recognized this male to be BENFORD, who had been driving the Jetta on January 28, 2021. BENFORD ordered food from the drive through window and returned to 190 Gallup Street. BENFORD was the same person that was operating the same Jetta on January 27, 2021 when surveillance observed him actively soliciting prospective check cashers in Providence and Pawtucket.

69. At approximately 9:15AM on February 1, 2021, BENFORD left 190 Gallup Street, entered the Jetta and drove back to the Burger King at 280 Broad St. BENFORD pulled up to a white male wearing a dark jacket and light sleeves. This male subsequently entered the passenger seat of the Jetta where it remained stopped for a short period of time. BENFORD, driving the Jetta, then left with the passenger in the vehicle and drove to the CVS located at 960 Broad St. BENFORD exited the Jetta and left it running with the passenger still inside. After BENFORD exited the Jetta, he jogged back to 190 Gallup Street. Upon arriving at the house, he knocked on the door and was let inside.

70. From approximately 9:25 a.m. to 10:05 a.m. on February 1, 2021, the Jetta remained parked and running with the cashier in the vehicle at CVS. At approximately 10:05 a.m., BENFORD exited 190 Gallup Street and walked back to CVS where he subsequently entered the vehicle and traveled to Rt. 95 north.

71. At approximately 10:47AM on February 1, 2021, Det. O'Connell located the Jetta at the Stop & Shop located 469 Pleasant St. in Attleboro. BENFORD was driving the Jetta in and out of the parking lot and there was no passenger inside. The vehicle at one point took a right onto Pleasant St., circled back through the parking lot one more time. A few moments later, BENFORD took a left turn onto Pleasant St. and surveillance noted a passenger inside the vehicle. Immediately after the Jetta left the area, Det. O'Connell and I went into the Citizens Banks store located within the Stop & Shop and spoke with the manager. The manager indicated there were not any attempts or successful cashing of any checks at that branch. The manager at Citizens Bank reported there had been a long line waiting for service so it is possible the person we were inquiring about had left without attempt to cash the check.

72. At approximately 11:00AM on February 1, 2021, Det. Jake Poulin of the Bridgewater Police Department informed me that the Jetta was parked at the Stop & Shop located at 251 Washington St. in Attleboro. The detective observed BENFORD driving the Jetta. The passenger had gone to the Citizens Bank located within the supermarket. After a short period of time later, the passenger got into the Jetta which then drove away with no further surveillance.

73. Det. O'Connell and I subsequently went to the bank and met with the manager. The manager told us that a person with a RI identification card, bearing the name of N.G., attempted to cash a \$2,600 check bearing the business name OPENAP of Narragansett, RI. The bank did not honor the check as the account number printed on the business check did not match the business name printed on the check. The manager provided a photo of the check and the person's identification.

74. On Tuesday, February 2, 2021, I was contacted by the same bank manager who informed me the same person, N.G., came into the bank at approximately 10:45 a.m. that day and attempted to cash another check from the same business account. The amount on the check was \$2400 and the account number printed on the check matched the business's account number.

75. On February 3, 2021, surveillance was commenced at the CVS at 960 Broad St and at 190 Gallup Street. At approximately 7:45 a.m., when surveillance began, the Volkswagen Jetta bearing NJ A86NCZ was parked in the driveway of 190 Gallup Street and the black Nissan Altima bearing PA LHH3841 was parked on the street at that location. At approximately 8:30am, both the Nissan and the Jetta left the location. Defendant WEAVER was driving the Nissan and the passenger was a black male wearing a gray Nike sweatshirt. WEAVER was wearing the same sweatshirt that he was wearing on January 28, 2021 and February 1, 2021. Officers then observed WEAVER and the passenger in the Nissan as they appeared to have been attempting to solicit check cashers in the Broad Street and Kennedy Plaza areas of Providence. The Nissan stopped several times to speak with who appeared to be random people who were

walking on the sidewalks. The operator of the Nissan would make sudden u-turns to talk with people.

76. Detectives also surveilled the Jetta after it left 190 Gallup Street. Defendant BENFORD was driving the Jetta; there were no other individuals in the car. As surveillance followed, BENFORD stopped several times to speak with who appeared to be random people who were walking on the sidewalks. BENFORD also made sudden u-turns.

77. At 9:07am, BENFORD drove the Jetta to the CVS lot, now with a passenger sitting in the front passenger seat. BENFORD exited the vehicle and walked toward Gallup Street. BENFORD entered 190 Gallup Street at approximately 9:10 a.m. while the passenger was waiting in the Jetta. The passenger was a white male wearing a red jacket and face mask. At 9:34am, BENFORD was observed leaving 190 Gallup Street and heading back to the Jetta. BENFORD then drove the Jetta down Thurbers Ave toward RT95. BENFORD then traveled on Route 95 South and took exit 10B onto Centerville Rd., Warwick, RI. BENFORD pulled the car into a car dealership next to Santander Bank, 1071 Centerville Rd Warwick RI, and parked.

78. At approximately 10:05 am, the passenger exited the Jetta and walked to Santander Bank. BENFORD was observed driving through the car dealership lots, parking in at least 4-5 different locations. Detective Webb entered Santander Bank and observed the passenger waiting to cash the check. Detective Webb then spoke with the bank manager, who reported that the transaction was declined and provides a photo of the passenger's license, indicating that he is W.S. of Cranston, RI.

79. On February 4, 2021, the owner of Glasgow Consulting Group reported to the Narragansett Police Department that on February 1, 2021 a piece of mail containing a business account check was placed in the outside business mailbox at night and the flag was placed up. The next day, the owner of the business came to the location in the morning and observed the flag up but the piece of mail containing the check missing. The bank records from Glasgow Consulting reveal that check #1299 from its Santander account was fraudulently cashed and apparently duplicated three times. The Santander images of these cashed checks reveal that all three were cashed in the name of W.S. W.S. is the individual that Detective Webb observed attempting to cash a check at the Santander Bank, 1071 Centerville Rd Warwick RI, on February 3, 2021.

Arrest of BENFORD and WILLIAMS on February 5, 2021

80. On February 5, 2021, a Bank of Newport branch in Providence, RI contacted the Providence Police to report a male individual in the bank who was attempting to cash a fraudulent check. The individual who attempted to cash the check was J.B. J.B. stated that two black males had offered him \$200 to cash the check and told him that if he didn't give them the rest of the money they would beat him up. J.B. pointed to a white sedan that was parked outside of the bank as containing the individuals who recruited him and provided him with the counterfeit check. Providence Police located the white sedan a short distance away. Defendants BENFORD and WILLIAMS were in the vehicle. One of the defendants had \$12,000 in cash on his person. Both defendants were then arrested.

81. Throughout the course of this conspiracy, more than 450 counterfeit checks were attempted to be cashed by individuals recruited by the defendants and their co-conspirators. As a result, financial institutions suffered an approximate loss of at least \$450,000.

CONCLUSION

82. Based on the facts set forth herein, there is probable cause to believe that from in or about October 2018 through February 5, 2021 in the Districts of Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maine and elsewhere, defendants AUSTIN WEAVER (“WEAVER”), CORTAVIOUS BENFORD (“BENFORD”), JALEN STANFORD (“STANFORD”) and MICHAEL WILLIAMS (“WILLIAMS”) conspired with one another and with others known and unknown to the United States to knowingly execute and attempt to execute a scheme to defraud financial institutions and to obtain money, funds and property owned by or under the control of financial institutions, by means of false and fraudulent pretenses representations and promises, contrary to 18 U.S.C. § 1344, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1349.



MATTHEW REARDON
Lieutenant - Medway Police

Secret Service Task Force Officer

Attested to by the applicant in accordance with the requirements of Fed.R. Crim. P. 4.1
by telephone. **Sworn telephonically and signed electronically**

February 5, 2021

Date

Providence, Rhode Island

~~Providence, Rhode Island~~

City and State



Judge's signature

Patricia A. Sullivan, US Magistrate Judge

Printed name and title

DEFENDANT INFORMATION RELATIVE TO A CRIMINAL ACTION - IN U.S. DISTRICT COURT

BY: INFORMATION INDICTMENT COMPLAINT

CASE NO. 1:21MJ09PAS

Matter Sealed: Juvenile Other than Juvenile
 Pre-Indictment Plea Superseding Defendant Added
 Indictment Charges/Counts Added
 Information

USA vs.
 Defendant: Cortavious Benford

Address: 

Name of District Court, and/or Judge/Magistrate Location (City)
 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT RHODE ISLAND
 DISTRICT OF RHODE ISLAND Divisional Office

Name and Office of Person Furnishing Information on THIS FORM
AARON WEISMAN
 U.S. Atty Other U.S. Agency
 Phone No. (401) 709-5000
 Name of Asst. U.S. Attorney (if assigned) LEE H. VILKER

Interpreter Required Dialect: _____

Birth Date  Male Alien
 Female (if applicable)

Social Security Number _____

PROCEEDING

Name of Complainant Agency, or Person (& Title, if any)
United States Secret Service/Medway Police

person is awaiting trial in another Federal or State Court (give name of court)

this person/proceeding transferred from another district per (circle one) FRCrP 20, 21 or 40. Show District

this is a re prosecution of charges previously dismissed which were dismissed on motion of:
 U.S. Atty Defense

this prosecution relates to a pending case involving this same defendant. (Notice of Related Case must still be filed with the Clerk.)

prior proceedings or appearance(s) before U.S. Magistrate Judge regarding this defendant were recorded under

SHOW DOCKET NO.

MAG. JUDGE CASE NO.

Place of offense RHODE ISLAND County

DEFENDANT

Issue: Warrant Summons

Location Status:

Arrest Date _____ or Date Transferred to Federal Custody _____

Currently in Federal Custody

Currently in State Custody

Writ Required

Currently on bond

Fugitive

Defense Counsel (if any): _____

FPD CJA RET'D

Appointed on Target Letter

This report amends AO 257 previously submitted

OFFENSE CHARGED - U.S.C. CITATION - STATUTORY MAXIMUM PENALTIES - ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OR COMMENTS

Total # of Counts 2

Set	Title & Section/Offense Level (Petty = 1 / Misdemeanor = 3 / Felony = 4)	Description of Offense Charged	Felony/Misd.
1	18 U.S.C. § 1344	Bank Fraud	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Felony <input type="checkbox"/> Misdemeanor
			<input type="checkbox"/> Felony <input type="checkbox"/> Misdemeanor
2	18 U.S.C. § 1349	Conspiracy to Commit Bank Fraud	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Felony <input type="checkbox"/> Misdemeanor
			<input type="checkbox"/> Felony <input type="checkbox"/> Misdemeanor
		Trial days: 7 days	<input type="checkbox"/> Felony <input type="checkbox"/> Misdemeanor