

## **Attorney General Shapiro: Major organized crime ring fraudulently obtained thousands of PA license plates in schemes spanning multiple states**

*Statewide grand jury recommends charges against 12 people and 14 businesses in connection with multiple schemes involving automobiles*

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HARRISBURG — Attorney General Josh Shapiro today announced criminal charges against a dozen people accused of taking part in a major organized crime ring that fraudulently obtained more than a thousand Pennsylvania license plates and used them to fuel a massive criminal enterprise involving automobiles in multiple states.

By illegally renting the license plates in New York City and other locations, this crime ring profited significantly and allowed those who used the fraudulent plates to avoid paying more than \$1 million in parking fines and EZ Pass tolls across several states.

The organized crime ring was headed by Rafael Levi, 50, of Brooklyn, N.Y., Attorney General Shapiro said at a news conference today at the Office of Attorney General in Strawberry Square. Charges were also filed today against 14 Pennsylvania businesses involved in the crime ring. The charges followed an extensive investigation by the Attorney General's Insurance Fraud Section and a statewide investigative grand jury.

"This organized criminal ring used legitimate business tactics – applying for licenses and insurance, car loans and purchases – for completely illegitimate purposes," Attorney General Shapiro said at today's news conference. "From fraudulently-obtained license plates to washed car titles to multiple other frauds, they gamed the system to rack up millions of dollars in illegal profits. It's widespread criminal conduct and today we brought a halt to it."

According to a grand jury presentment made public today, here are the major elements of the fraudulent schemes perpetrated by the Levi ring:

- **License plates fraudulently obtained:** Levi and his associates provided fraudulent documents, to the PA Departments of Transportation and State. As a result, they illegally obtained more than a thousand Pennsylvania license plates. They rented the plates for \$400 a month or more. The people who got these plates avoided paying

parking fines and EZ Pass tolls totaling \$1 million in New York, Pennsylvania and neighborhood states.

- **Fake insurance cards:** The Levi ring provided cars and vehicles with fake insurance cards. When accidents would happen involving any of these cars, motorists filed claims with insurance companies – but there was no legitimate policy to pay on.
- **Washed car titles:** The ring issued phony letters to PennDOT which enabled them to get clean titles on vehicles. The Levi ring scammed \$500,000 owed to financial institutions through this part of the scheme.
- **Fraudulent odometer rollbacks:** The ring rolled back odometer readings on 35 cars – enabled them to sell cars for more money than they otherwise would've sold for.
- **Drivers' licenses:** The ring obtained Pennsylvania drivers licenses at an address in Pennsylvania that they defendants never lived at – another part of the scheme.

“Rafael Levi and his co-defendants used all these criminal schemes to live in the lap of luxury,” Attorney General Shapiro said, citing a prime example: Luxury autos which the ring obtained through fraud, including a red Ferrari.

Through this fraud, the ring would get one of their interlocking dealerships to “buy” a vehicle in cash. The ring then proceeded to wash the car through another of the Levi organization’s many dealerships. The ring avoiding paying more than \$100,000 in PA sales tax in this manner.

Attorney General Shapiro said the investigation was ongoing, and investigators have notified law enforcement in other states of possible criminal conduct involving the Levi ring in other states.

This investigation began after the Attorney General’s Insurance Fraud Section received information from the Pennsylvania State Police. Agents from the Attorney General’s office worked closely with State Police and investigators from the office of New York State Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman.

Attorney General Shapiro thanked General Schneiderman, the Pennsylvania State Police and every law enforcement agent and prosecutor who worked on the complex investigation.

“We brought this organized crime ring down because of the cooperation and collaboration of many law enforcement agencies,” Shapiro said. “We thank General Schneiderman, the Pennsylvania State Police and every agent who worked on this case.”

“We were proud to partner with Attorney General Shapiro to assist in uncovering this inter-state criminal scheme,” said New York Attorney General Schneiderman. “We will continue to work with our partners in law enforcement to ensure that fraudsters and scammers who selfishly line

their own pockets at the expense of taxpayers are brought to justice.”  
A list of all defendants and the businesses charged today in connection with the Levi organized crime ring is available [here](#).  
Anyone with information about the individuals or businesses involved in this investigation is encouraged to call the Office of Attorney General’s Insurance Fraud Section at 717-787-0272.  
This case will be prosecuted by Senior Deputy Attorney General Robert LaBar of the Attorney General’s Insurance Fraud Section.  
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