



718.286.6000
WWW.QUEENSDA.ORG

QUEENS COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY
125-01 QUEENS BOULEVARD
KEW GARDENS, NEW YORK 11415-1568



MELINDA KATZ
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

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CONTACT: QDA PRESS Office (718) 286-6315
QDACommunications@queensda.org

**QUEENS HUSBAND AND WIFE CHARGED WITH OPERATING INTERNATIONAL
STOLEN MERCHANDISE RING OUT OF KEW GARDENS HILLS HOME AND
STOREFRONT IN DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

Defendants Sold More Than \$2 Million in Stolen Goods in Two Years; Found in Possession of More Than \$1 Million Worth of Stolen Makeup, Perfume, Beauty Products and More; Couple and Two Co-Defendants Charged with Fostering the Sale of Stolen Goods, First Time Charge Used in New York

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz and Governor Kathy Hochul announced today that married couple Cristopher Guzman and Yvelisse Guzman Batista, as well as three co-defendants, were charged with operating a large-scale retail theft and fencing operation. The pair sold stolen merchandise including high-end makeup, perfume, beauty products, designer clothing and accessories, locally and abroad under the name Yvelisse Fashion, LLC. The Guzmans allegedly directed retail theft crews to steal specific merchandise and then sold the stolen products from their home and a storefront in the Dominican Republic. The couple is also alleged to have paid truck drivers to divert products bound for retailers such as Sephora and Ulta Beauty from manufacturer warehouses directly to locations under their control. Among the charges brought against the defendants is fostering the sale of stolen goods, the first time this newly adopted crime has been charged in New York.

District Attorney Katz said: “These arrests once again prove that consumers should be extremely careful about buying items on social media or from unfamiliar vendors. As we approach the holiday season, take great care to know the genesis of the products you are buying. As alleged, the defendants ran a widespread fencing operation that offered stolen merchandise for sale far below retail prices. Through locations in Queens County and the Dominican Republic, this crew sold more than \$2 million in stolen merchandise in a two-year period. This marks the first time in New York anyone has been charged for the crime of fostering the sale of stolen goods, a new measure passed by the legislature and signed into law by Governor Hochul to stop the sale of stolen goods through both online platforms and brick-and-mortar locations. We thank the governor for her leadership on this issue and our partners at the New York State Police and Homeland Security Investigations New York for their work on this ongoing investigation.”

Governor Kathy Hochul said: “New Yorkers are sick and tired of the retail theft that has been plaguing our businesses and communities – I promised we would fight it head on and now we are seeing results. Earlier this year, we gave law enforcement and store owners the tools and support needed to help meet this challenge, and today with our partner District Attorney Katz, we’re taking down a massive retail theft ring stretching from New York City to Maryland to the Dominican Republic. Keeping New Yorkers safe is my number one priority, and as we enter the holiday shopping season, we will continue focusing our efforts to ensure people feel safe walking into stores and business owners can focus on serving their customers instead of locking up everyday

items like toothpaste and deodorant.”

New York State Police Superintendent Steven G. James said: “Retail theft not only financially impacts a business, but also presents peril to business owners, retail workers and patrons. I want to thank District Attorney Katz and her staff for her collaboration on this case, and Governor Hochul for providing the support and resources necessary to carry out these arrests. The State Police remains fully engaged on this issue and will not tolerate the actions of individuals responsible for stealing tens of thousands of dollars in merchandise, victimizing both retailers and the public.”

HSI New York Special Agent in Charge William S. Walker said: “Organized retail theft is far from a victimless crime. Estimates show the average American family pays over \$500 annually in additional costs due to the impact of organized retail crime, The HSI New York Border Enforcement Security Task Force's Trade Enforcement and Interdiction Group is integrated within the city's ports, borders, shipping facilities, and beyond with the unwavering goal of keeping New Yorkers safe from threats seen and unseen. Today's announcement is the result of HSI's continued collaboration with New York State Police, the Queens District Attorney's Office, the New York City Police Department, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and serves as a stark reminder that when something seems too good to be true, it's because it likely is.”

Christopher Guzman, 35, Yvelisse Guzman Batista, 29, and Rosa Rodriguez Santana, 59, all of 75th Avenue in Kew Gardens Hills; and Johanny Almonte Reyes, 33, of 71st Avenue in Fresh Meadows, were arraigned on charges of criminal possession of stolen property in the first degree, four counts of criminal possession of stolen property in the second degree, conspiracy in the fourth degree, three counts of attempted criminal possession of stolen property in the third degree, criminal possession of stolen property in the fourth degree and four counts of fostering the sale of stolen goods. The defendants are due back in court on January 15, 2025, and face up to 8 1/3 years to 25 years in prison if convicted of the top charge.

Guzman is additionally charged with two counts of criminal possession of a weapon in the fourth degree.

Co-defendant Tiffany Leon Fuentes, 29, of 133rd Avenue in Ozone Park, is charged with criminal possession of stolen property in the first degree, four counts of criminal possession of stolen property in the second degree, grand larceny in the third degree, conspiracy in the fourth degree, three counts of grand larceny in the fourth degree and petit larceny. She is due back in court January 15, 2025, and faces up to 8 1/3 years to 25 years in prison if convicted of the top charge.

DA Katz said, that according to the charges and investigation, Cristopher Guzman and Yvelisse Guzman Batista, who are married, purchased large quantities of stolen retail cosmetic goods, beauty products, perfume, designer clothing and accessories from numerous theft crews that stole from retailers up and down the East Coast. They also organized the large-scale theft of merchandise directly from manufactures before it was distributed to retail outlets. Co-defendants Rosa Rodriguez Santana, who is Yvelisse Guzman Batista's mother, Johanny Almonte Reyes and Tiffany Leon Fuentes assisted in the operation.

The defendants received approximately \$50,000 worth of stolen goods per week for which they paid the theft crews approximately 10 to 15% of retail value. The goods were then catalogued and sold in New York through online advertisements as well as from a brick-and-mortar boutique called Yvelisse Fashion in Santiago, Dominican Republic.

After becoming aware of the theft ring, investigators from the Queens DA's Office, New York State Police and Homeland Security Investigations New York launched an investigation. Members of the law

enforcement team conducted an undercover operation into the defendants' activities at their home and an apartment in Fresh Meadows. Undercover investigators conducted three controlled sales of purported stolen goods to the couple including beauty products and perfume. They sold a total of \$22,926 in merchandise and were paid \$3,711 or 16% of the retail value. According to the allegations, during those operations the Guzmans made numerous requests of the undercover investigators to steal certain products based on the high demand from their buyers.

An undercover operative also allegedly made a controlled purchase of merchandise from the Guzmans after contacting them through a social media page. The operative was directed to the Guzmans' residence and then sent to the basement, which was set up as a retail store with shelves of merchandise. Among the items purchased by the undercover operative was perfume, which had been sold to the couple by the first undercover operatives for \$20. The operative bought the perfume for \$120, about two-thirds of its retail value.

Surveillance operations, combined with information provided by retail partners, revealed at least one defendant, Tiffany Leon Fuentes, was observed on video stealing from retail establishments and then arriving at the alleged fencing location in Fresh Meadows to sell those stolen goods to the Guzmans with the assistance of Santana and Reyes.

In one instance, Fuentes was seen on video on October 24, removing \$1,600 worth of makeup concealer and other products from Ulta Beauty in Chester, NJ. Later that day, she was seen carrying a large bag into the Guzmans' alleged fencing location.

On October 31, Fuentes was allegedly seen on video removing \$1,718 worth of cosmetics from Ulta Beauty in Towson, Md. Later that day, she was seen taking a large bag to the Guzmans' fencing location.

Between June 1, 2024, and September 30, 2024, a large quantity of products with a retail value of more than \$795,000 was taken from the warehouse of Sol de Janeiro, a skin care and beauty manufacturer, by delivery trucks that were destined for retailers Ulta Beauty and Sephora. The products never arrived at their intended destinations.

The Guzmans are alleged to have paid the delivery drivers to bring the products directly to them.

Bank records show that from January 10, 2022, to September 16, 2024, the Guzmans made 279 payments to 51 different individuals totaling \$230,041.98. The payees were designated as "vendedora," a Spanish term meaning female seller or vendor, a term that the Guzmans are alleged to have used to refer to the theft crew members. Ledgers and other notebooks recovered at the search warrant locations further showed hundreds of other similar payments dating back to at least 2021.

The operation is estimated to have taken in \$2 million in sales two years.

As alleged, in order to ship the stolen merchandise to the Dominican Republic storefront, video surveillance showed large blue plastic barrels being delivered and then picked up from the Guzmans' Fresh Meadows location. Two barrels, which had bills of lading noting that they contained "cosmetics and makeup" and were destined for the Dominican Republic, were stopped at the Red Hook port on November 6 by Homeland Security Investigations New York. Two additional barrels also containing cosmetics and makeup were stopped on November 13.

A court-authorized search warrant executed at the Guzmans' home, the Fresh Meadows location, and a third location in Briarwood on November 22 resulted in the seizure of:

- Over 50,000 retail beauty products, cosmetics, perfume, designer clothing and accessories with a total retail value of \$1,096,004.74
- This total included approximately 31,622 products in their original wholesale packaging allegedly stolen from the Sol de Janeiro distribution center with a retail value of \$795,560
- Other recovered items included merchandise from the brands Maybelline, Fenty, La Roche-Posay, Benefit, Nars, Too Faced, Charlotte Tilbury, Dior, Yve Saint Laurent, Versace, Valentino, Prada, Zara, Ferragamo, Anthropologie, Victoria's Secret, American Eagle, and numerous others
- A money counter
- Label maker
- Sticker labels and thank you cards bearing the name "Yvelisse Fashion"
- Two large plastic shipping barrels
- Bills of lading
- Numerous books, ledgers and notepads
- Two polymer ghost gun kits each containing one unserialized and unfinished firearm lower receiver along with lower part kits

The investigation was conducted by the New York State Police Special Investigations Unit including members of the Governor's Retail Theft Task Force under the supervision of Major Samuel P. Spezio along with members of the Queens District Attorney's Detective Bureau under the supervision of Sergeant David Moore, Lieutenant Joseph Oliver, Deputy Chief Janet Helgeson, Assistant Chief Daniel O'Brien, and under the overall supervision of the Chief Investigator of the Detective Bureau Robert LaPollo, as well as personnel from the Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) New York Border Enforcement Security Task Force's Trade Enforcement and Interdiction Group and Customs and Border Protection.

Retailers Ulta Beauty, Sephora, Macys, American Eagle and Victoria's Secret assisted in the investigation.

Assistant District Attorneys Shanon N. LaCorte, Chief of the District Attorney's Crime Strategies and Intelligence Bureau, and David Chiang, Assistant Deputy Chief, are prosecuting the case with the assistance of Intelligence Analysts Bushra Ahmed, Yadelis Feliz Jimenez, Luis Perez-Cortes, and Senior Intelligence Analyst Victoria Filipe, under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney of Investigations Gerard A. Brave.

Criminal complaints and indictments are accusations. A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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