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## **Los Angeles Man Sentenced to Federal Prison for Bank Fraud and Identity Theft Scheme**

PORTLAND, Ore.—A Los Angeles man was sentenced to federal prison today after he orchestrated an elaborate bank fraud and identity theft scheme targeting an elderly couple residing in Oregon.

Ijomah Joseph Oputa, 53, was sentenced to 36 months in federal prison and five years' supervised release. Oputa was also ordered to pay \$40,396 in restitution and forfeit \$32,478.

According to court documents, since his arrest in Los Angeles in March 2021, Oputa has failed to disclose to law enforcement the details of his many suspected fraud schemes. Instead, he has repeatedly misled investigators on his sources and level of income as well as basic biographical details such as his date of birth, where and with whom he lives, how many siblings he has, and whether his parents are still living. Oputa's repeated obfuscation of basic facts presented significant challenges to law enforcement. Despite these, investigators successfully uncovered a scheme Oputa concocted targeting an elderly couple residing in northeast Oregon.

In April of 2019, an elderly victim and his wife, both in their seventies, obtained a home equity line of credit from First Community Credit Union (FCCU). The couple accessed cash from this line of credit via an account they maintained at FCCU. Just two weeks after receiving the loan, Oputa called FCCU's customer-service line, pretending to be his elderly victim. Oputa verified his stolen identity with the victim's basic biographical details, account number, and monthly payment information. Oputa then proceeded to hijack his victim's account.

After linking the victim's bank account to his own email address, Oputa changed the mailing address on the account to a mailbox he controlled at a commercial mail drop in Los Angeles. Oputa then requested that a debit card linked to the account be issued to himself. Between June 2 and July 12, 2019, Oputa used the debit card to purchase 41 money orders at five U.S. Postal Service locations in the greater Los Angeles area. Together, the money orders totaled more than \$32,000. Oputa deposited most of the money orders into bank accounts he maintained under other stolen identities at several Los Angeles banks. A review of records from one such account revealed that 74 money orders totaling nearly \$71,000 had been laundered through it.

In mid-July 2019, the adult victim reported the unauthorized account activity to FCCU and local police. By then, FCCU had suffered losses exceeding \$40,000. Local police referred the investigation to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS).

On February 27, 2021, Oputa was charged by criminal complaint with aggravated identity theft and bank fraud. Later, on March 16, 2021, a federal grand jury in Portland indicted him on the same charges. Finally, on April 20, 2022, Oputa pleaded guilty to both charges.

U.S. Attorney Scott Erik Asphaug of the District of Oregon made the announcement.

This case was investigated by USPIS with assistance from the IRS, Environmental Protection Agency, and Small Business Administration Office of Inspector General. It was prosecuted by Ryan W. Bounds, Assistant U.S. Attorney for the District of Oregon.

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