

Aug 19, 2024

Contact Kylie Mason

Phone (850) 245-0150



OFFICE OF THE
ATTORNEY GENERAL
STATE OF FLORIDA

Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

AG Moody's Statewide Prosecutors Secure 40-Year Prison Sentences for Members of Romanian Crime Ring that Stole More Than \$800,000 from Schools and Churches



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody's Office of Statewide Prosecution secured 40-year prison sentences for three members of a Romanian crime ring that stole hundreds of thousands of dollars from schools and churches. A Fort Myers jury found Panait Dumitru, Catalin Trandafir and Simona Trandafir guilty of racketeering, conspiracy to commit racketeering, grand theft, money laundering, aggravated white-collar crime, and unlawful possession of personal identification information. According to a Florida Department of Law Enforcement investigation, the crime ring stole more than \$800,000 in checks from school and church mailboxes in six states.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "Florida is a law-and-order state, and we work hard to hold criminals accountable. This Romanian crime ring stole more than \$800,000 by taking checks from the mailboxes of more than 250 churches and schools in six states. Many of the donor victims were seniors. Thanks to the hard work of our law enforcement partners and our Statewide Prosecutors, we have stopped this illicit operation, and three group members will now serve serious time behind bars."

FDLE Commissioner Mark Glass said, “This case showcases FDLE’s best work from detailed analysis, to serving search warrants, and working across regions. It also demonstrates the importance we play in court, breaking down complex facts so juries can easily understand the case.”

According to the investigation, Panait Dumitru, Catalin Trandafir and Simona Trandafir, along with other group members, Marius Dumitru (1987), Marius Dumitru (1993) and Ionut Raducan, stole checks from the mailboxes of more than 250 churches and schools throughout Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina and South Carolina. When some of the churches installed mailboxes with locks, the defendants returned with crowbars to break into the mailboxes.

The group operated out of Orlando from 2019 to 2021. During the three-week trial, more than 60 pastors, reverends, ministers and priests testified to the thefts from their congregations.

The defendants deposited the stolen checks through a network of 59 bank accounts opened by various members of the ring using forged documents. The defendants then withdrew the cash from some of these banks and redeposited the cash in other accounts. The criminal ring funneled more than 1,600 checks totaling more than \$800,000 through the accounts.

Attorney General Moody’s OSP charged Panait Dumitru, Catalin Trandafir and Simona Trandafir with conspiracy to commit racketeering, racketeering, grand theft, unlawful possession of personal identification information, money laundering and aggravated white-collar crime.

Two other defendants, Dumitru (1987) and Dumitru (1993), have fled. Raducan previously pled open to the court and was sentenced to 10 years in Florida state prison.

Attorney General Moody’s OSP handled the case. The Honorable Judge Bruce Kyle sentenced each of the defendants to 40 years in state prison.

#