



Orange County District Attorney,
Orange County Sheriff's Department,
and Tustin Police Department



Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: January 27, 2022

Contact: Kimberly Edds
Public Information Officer
Orange County District Attorney

Sgt. Ryan Anderson
Public Information Officer
Orange County Sheriff's Department

Office: 714-347-8405

714-647-7042

Cell: 714-504-1917

714-904-7042

Thieves target Latino community members in Facebook Marketplace Ad Schemes to Steal at least 50 Vehicles

Orange County law enforcement agencies warn residents about ploys that leave unsuspecting victims stranded while car thieves drive off in their vehicles

SANTA ANA, Calif. – Orange County law enforcement agencies are warning residents about an elaborate scheme thieves are using to steal vehicles from members of the Latino community under the guise of hiring them to transport money using their own vehicles. Most of the victims were targeted through ads posted on Facebook Marketplace and other social media platforms and the transactions were mainly conducted in Spanish.

In more than 50 cases across Orange County, unsuspecting victims were left without the exorbitant sums of money they were promised to be paid for the job and without their vehicles after the criminals left in the vehicle after telling the victims they needed to take it to another location to load it with the money to be transported. The victims were left waiting on the street for their vehicle to return and the thieves never came back.

The Orange County Auto Theft Task Force (OCATT) has investigated more than 50 of these cases occurring in cities across Orange County since July 2021.

Because of the nature of the theft, some victims have been hesitant to contact law enforcement.

“These criminals are preying on those who may be struggling financially through advertising get-rich-quick schemes,” Sheriff Don Barnes said. “The Sheriff’s Department and our regional law enforcement partners are working to educate our communities about these criminal enterprises and how to protect themselves. Do not fall prey to these scams.”

“Members of the Latino community are being specifically targeted by these thieves in the hopes that they are too afraid to come forward out of fear that they too may be implicated in a criminal enterprise or have deportation issues,” said Orange County District Attorney Todd Spitzer. “Many people have to rely on a single vehicle for transportation for their entire family to go to work and school and having that vehicle stolen is devastating. We

will not allow these predators to continue to target vulnerable victims just to make a quick buck.”

“Through collaboration with our partnering Orange County law enforcement agencies, the Tustin Police Department has continuously worked to limit the impact of these crimes on our Latino community,” said Tustin Police Chief Stu Greenberg. “We will continue to thoroughly investigate any type of crimes reported to our Law Enforcement Officers while seeking to identify and arrest all individuals operating under this false pretense.”

If you have been a victim or have been solicited regarding this scheme, please contact your local police agency. Anonymous tips can be submitted to OC Crime Stoppers at 855-TIP-OCCS (855-847-6227) or at occrimestoppers.org.