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CITY EMPLOYEE PLEADS GUILTY TO CHECK THEFT SCHEME

Damian Williams, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and Jocelyn E. Strauber, the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Investigation ("DOI"), announced today that BRANDON SANTANOO, an employee of the New York City Law Department (the "Law Department"), pled guilty to conspiracy to commit bank fraud in connection with his participation in a scheme to steal checks mailed to the Law Department and then to deposit or attempt to deposit forged, altered, and fraudulently endorsed versions of those checks into bank accounts not associated with the Law Department. SANTANOO pled guilty before U.S. Magistrate Judge Jennifer E. Willis.

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said: "Brandon Santanoo abused his position of trust as a city employee. As he admitted today in federal court, he stole hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of checks made payable to the Law Department and passed them along to others to fraudulently deposit. We will not tolerate any breach of trust or corruption within city agencies."

DOI Commissioner Jocelyn E. Strauber said: "Brandon Santanoo used his position at the City Law Department to steal approximately 40 checks payable to the City – and valued at approximately \$600,000 – and then handed them out to acquaintances to forge, alter, or fraudulently endorse the checks and then deposit into private bank accounts. I thank the Law Department for the referral to DOI that prompted this investigation and our law enforcement partners in the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York for their commitment to hold accountable City employees who exploit their access to engage in criminal conduct, and to protect valuable City resources from theft."

According to the allegations in the Information and the Complaint, the plea agreement, and statements made in court:

Beginning in 2017, SANTANOO worked as a clerk in the mail room at the Law Department's office in Brooklyn. By virtue of his position, SANTANOO had access to mail that was sent to the Law Department.

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From at least in or about June 2021 through at least in or about May 2023, SANTANOO stole checks that had been mailed to the Law Department, including checks made payable to the Law Department's Worker's Compensation Division, which is responsible for administering claims of city employees who are injured on the job. SANTANOO then passed those checks onto other people, who deposited or attempted to deposit forged, altered, and fraudulently endorsed versions of those checks into third parties' bank accounts. Approximately 40 checks, totaling approximately \$600,000, were stolen and deposited or attempted to be deposited as part of the scheme.

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SANTANOO, 27, of Queens Village, New York, pled guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit bank fraud, which carries a maximum potential sentence of 30 years in prison.

The maximum potential sentence is prescribed by Congress and is provided here for informational purposes only, as any sentencing of the defendant will be determined by a judge. Sentencing is scheduled for September 4, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. before U.S. District Judge Richard M. Berman.

Mr. Williams praised the outstanding investigative work of the DOI. Mr. Williams also thanked the Special Agents from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York for their assistance on this matter.

The case is being handled by the Office's Public Corruption Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorney Stephanie Simon is in charge of the prosecution.

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