



The City of New York
Department of Investigation

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BROOKLYN MAN PLEADS GUILTY AND MUST PAY RESTITUTION IN CONNECTION WITH FRAUDULENTLY SUBMITTING ONLINE HEALTH SURVEYS TO ILLEGALLY OBTAIN NEARLY \$8,000 IN CITY-FUNDED GIFT CARDS

Jocelyn E. Strauber, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Investigation ("DOI"), announced the guilty plea today of a Brooklyn man who used a "Bot program," a computer program that performs automatic repetitive tasks, to answer hundreds of online health surveys in order to steal \$7,774 in electronic gift card ("e-gift card") funds from the City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene ("DOHMH"). The e-gift cards were offered as an incentive to complete two public health surveys distributed between August and November 2023. DOI's investigation was prompted by a DOHMH report that the vendor administering the surveys, ABT Associates, noticed discrepancies on multiple survey submissions. The office of Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez prosecuted the case.

KENNY CHAI, 43, of Brooklyn, N.Y., pled guilty today to disorderly conduct, a violation. As part of the plea agreement, CHAI was sentenced to five days of community service and ordered to pay \$7,774 in restitution.

DOI Commissioner Jocelyn E. Strauber said, "Today the defendant is held accountable for stealing from a City program that sought to incentivize City residents to provide important public health information, and must repay over \$7,000 to the City. I thank DOHMH for referring this matter to DOI and the Brooklyn District Attorney for its partnership and commitment to protect public resources."

According to the criminal complaint, ABT Associates, on behalf of DOHMH, administered two public health surveys between August and November 2023; the Community Health Survey for adults and the Kid Survey for children ages one through 13. These surveys were designed to collect data from randomly selected City households to better understand the health status, behaviors, and needs of residents across the five boroughs. Households were eligible to receive an e-gift card as an incentive for completing the survey -- \$30 for each completed adult survey and \$25 for each completed child survey -- with a cap of one adult and two children per household, for a potential maximum of \$80 per household. Respondents were required to enter a valid email address in the portal to receive their e-gift cards electronically, distributed through a third-party vendor, Virtual Incentives.

According to the criminal complaint, CHAI's household was legitimately selected to complete the survey in August 2023 and CHAI completed the survey, and then employed a Bot program to generate fraudulent User IDs and complete hundreds of additional surveys to obtain e-gift card incentives. Between August 2023 and November 2023, CHAI redeemed more than 250 fraudulently obtained e-gift cards using temporary email addresses and ultimately directed funds to PayPal and Amazon accounts linked to himself. Verizon records indicated CHAI completed the surveys and redeemed the e-gift cards via IP addresses

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associated with his Brooklyn address. In all, funds from 277 e-gift cards were transferred to the defendant's Amazon and PayPal accounts and then to his personal bank accounts. Funds from 216 e-gift cards, totaling \$6,417.50, were uploaded to the defendant's Pay Pal accounts; and funds from 61 e-gift cards were uploaded to the defendant's Amazon.com account, totaling \$1,356.60. CHAI did not have permission and authority to obtain or retain the \$7,774.10 in e-gift card funds.

Commissioner Strauber thanked Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez for his Office's partnership on this investigation and prosecution, which is being handled by Assistant District Attorney Pamela Lowe and supervised by Assistant District Attorneys Adam Libove and Laura Neubauer, Deputy Chief and Chief of the District Attorney's Public Integrity Bureau, respectively. Commissioner Strauber also thanked DOHMH Acting Health Commissioner and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Michelle Morse, MPH, and her staff, for their report to DOI that led to this investigation and their assistance during the investigation.

At DOI, the investigation was conducted by Confidential Investigator Farhana Begum with DOI's Office of the Inspector General for DOHMH and was supervised by Assistant Inspector General Shakina Griffith, Deputy Inspector General Mary Kozlow, Inspector General Thomas Kapp, Deputy Commissioner of Strategic Initiatives Christopher Ryan and Deputy Commissioner/Chief of Investigations Dominick Zarrella.

DOI is one of the oldest law-enforcement agencies in the country and New York City's corruption watchdog. Investigations may involve any agency, officer, elected official or employee of the City, as well as those who do business with or receive benefits from the City. DOI's strategy attacks corruption comprehensively through systemic investigations that lead to high-impact arrests, preventive internal controls and operational reforms that improve the way the City runs.

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