



Texas Financial Crimes Intelligence Center
218 E. Elm Street
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www.fcic.texas.gov

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 29, 2026

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Multi-Agency Investigation Dismantles Multi-Million Dollar Gift Card Tampering Ring

BUDA, TX – The Texas Financial Crimes Intelligence Center (FCIC), in collaboration with the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS), the Hays County District Attorney's Office, and the Hays County Proactive Unit, successfully dismantled a sophisticated organized gift card tampering operation.

The multi-phase investigation resulted in the arrest of three suspects and the recovery of 11,563 gift cards. Based on the total potential value of the recovered cards, authorities estimate the operation prevented approximately \$5,699,650 in financial losses to consumers.

The investigation began in March 2026 after FCIC Gulf Coast Field Operations investigators were alerted by a local retailer to suspicious activity. A store employee observed a male suspect loitering near the gift card display. A subsequent inspection of the kiosk revealed 15 altered gift cards.

Investigators quickly identified a rental vehicle associated with the suspects. Through coordinated surveillance and investigative efforts, agents tracked the suspects as they traveled between Houston and Austin. The investigation uncovered an organized, transient criminal ring. The suspects entered the United States using Taiwanese passports, rented a vehicle in Austin, and established a base of operations in Houston. Over a five-day period, the suspects were observed visiting more than 20 retail locations per day.

Suspects in this case allegedly used a calculated four-step process designed to avoid detection by both retailers and consumers:



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1. **Theft:** Suspects remove large quantities of gift cards from retail displays at stores, including Walgreens, CVS, and Dollar Tree.
2. **Compromise:** Working from a hotel or residence, the suspects peeled back security scratch protectors to record activation codes and serial numbers. They then repackaged the cards, so they appeared intact.
3. **Return:** The tampered cards were returned to store shelves. To an unsuspecting consumer, the card looks brand new.
4. **Draining Funds:** Once a consumer purchased and activated the card at the register, the suspects allegedly drained the funds electronically, leaving the victim with a zero balance.

On March 30, 2026, investigators apprehended Houjie Lin and Yi-Hsun Wu at a retail location in Buda, TX, where they were allegedly committing the offense of gift card tampering.

- **Vehicle Seizure:** During the Buda arrest, a search of the suspects' vehicle yielded 80 tampered gift cards, two Taiwanese passports, and a glove box filled with rubber bands, an indicator of the high-volume nature of the processing operation.
- **Austin Hotel Search:** On April 1, 2026, authorities executed a search warrant at an Austin hotel room. Investigators apprehended Hsai Lin at the scene while she was allegedly processing and dismantling gift cards. More than 3,000 compromised cards were recovered at this location.
- **Houston Residential Search:** On April 10, 2026, the investigation led to a residence in the Sharpstown area of Houston. Investigators believe this location served as the primary base for the ring. A search of the premises yielded an additional 277 bundles of gift cards hidden in a closet.

The three individuals identified and charged are believed to be affiliated with a transnational organized crime group:



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Houjie Lin



Yi-Hsun Wu



Hsai Lin

Each suspect faces charges of **First-Degree Felony Enhanced Engaging in Organized Criminal Activity (Texas Penal Code 71.02)**. The predicate offense for these charges is **Fraudulent Use, Possession, or Tampering with Gift Card Data (Texas Penal Code 32.56)**. Under Texas law, these enhanced charges carry a minimum term of fifteen years in prison.

"This investigation highlights our commitment to protecting both the financial security of our citizens and the integrity of our local economy," said Captain Jeff Headley of the FCIC. "Organized retail crime of this nature targets everyday Texans. By disrupting these rings, we are not only stopping millions of dollars in potential fraud but also ensuring that consumers can have confidence in the products they purchase at our local retailers."

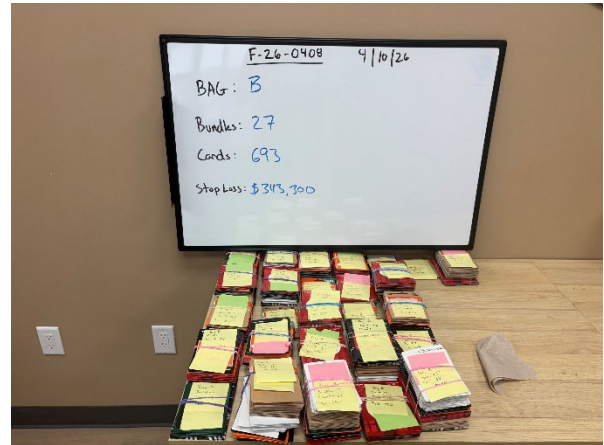
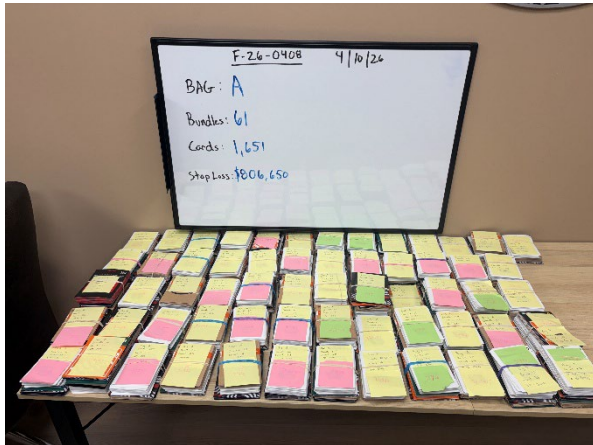




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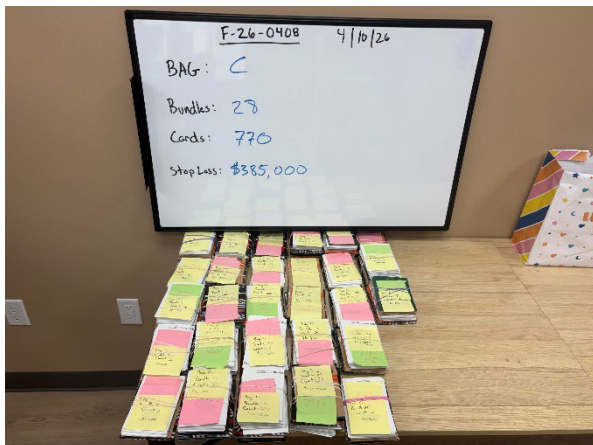
Austin Recovered Gift Cards

Houston Recovered Gift Cards



Houston Recovered Gift Cards A

Houston Recovered Gift Cards B





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Houston Recovered Gift Cards C



Houston Recovered Gift Cards E

Houston Recovered Gift Cards D



Houston Recovered Gift Cards F

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