

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
BLUE RIDGE JUDICIAL CIRCUIT



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Two Defendants Sentenced to 20 Years for Multistate Organized Retail Crime Scheme
State vs. Ebony Fallon Washington (aka Stephanie Harris) and Melissa Holland (aka Keisha Wilson)

May 7, 2025 – District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway announces that, during separate hearings, Superior Court Judge Jennifer L. Davis sentenced two co-defendants to 20 years, with the first 10 years to be served in prison, after both pled guilty to three counts of violating Georgia’s Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act.

Ebony Fallon Washington (aka Stephanie Harris), 43, and Melissa Holland (aka Keisha Wilson), 46, both of New York, operated a multi-state organized retail theft scheme targeting Walmart and Target locations. Washington entered a negotiated plea on March 6, and Holland entered a non-negotiated plea on May 6. Both received the same sentence.

From June 2022 through August 2024, the defendants stole nearly \$141,000 in merchandise in 187 incidents in 21 states, including Georgia. Their scheme involved purchasing Apple AirPods with cash, using tools to remove the genuine products from their packaging, replacing them with lower-value items, resealing the boxes to appear unopened, and returning the fraudulent products for full cash refunds. In some cases, they used the refunded money to purchase additional AirPods, continuing the cycle. The defendants kept the authentic Apple products to resell for profit.

The scheme was perpetrated throughout Georgia, including stores in Acworth, Adel, Austell, Buford, Calhoun, Columbus, Conyers, Covington, Cumming, Dallas, Fayetteville, Flowery Branch, Fort Oglethorpe, Grovetown, Hampton, Hiram, Holly Springs, Kennesaw, LaFayette, Macon, Marietta, McDonough, Milton, Norcross, Rockmart, Roswell, Smyrna, Stockbridge, Tifton, Trion, and Woodstock.

“These defendants operated in a coordinated effort with a specific plan in place. Although only two stores in Cherokee County were directly affected, Georgia’s RICO Act enabled us to prosecute this broader criminal enterprise,” said Assistant District Attorney Rachel Murphy, of the Gang and Organized Crime Unit. “We are grateful for the collaboration of both law enforcement agencies and retail partners, who played a critical role in disrupting this organized retail theft ring. Our office remains committed to working closely with retail investigative units to identify, dismantle, and prosecute organized retail crime.”

The prosecution of these crimes began in May 2024 when Walmart Global Investigations met with the Gang and Organized Crime Unit, of the Cherokee County District Attorney’s Office, to discuss a large theft ring involving both Walmart and Target. The two stores had been working collaboratively to investigate the thefts and share information with each other and with law enforcement agencies.

On September 13, 2024, with the assistance of Woodstock Police Department, Coweta County Sheriff's Office, and other law enforcement agencies, both defendants were located and arrested in Coweta County. During the execution of a search warrant, law enforcement recovered key evidence from the defendants' rental car, including receipts for hotels located near retail stores targeted in the scheme as well as tools used to open the AirPods packaging. Additional evidence was obtained from five cell phones used by the defendants.

"Organized retail crime is a growing problem not only in our community, but nationwide. In Cherokee County, we judiciously use RICO indictments for individuals like these defendants who were clearly involved in an organized scheme which impacted stores locally as well as throughout the country," said District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway. "By holding these offenders accountable and imposing prison sentences, we are sending the message that those who engage in organized retail crime will be aggressively prosecuted in Cherokee County."

The case was investigated by Walmart Global Investigations, a Target field investigator, and Woodstock Police Department. Coweta County Sheriff's Office was instrumental in the apprehension of the defendants. The case was prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Rachel Murphy, with assistance from Investigator Bill Presnell and Investigator Justin Vath, with the Gang and Organized Crime Unit, Office of the District Attorney.

Additional Details on Sentencing

- On March 6, after Washington accepted a plea agreement offered by the State, Judge Davis sentenced her as negotiated to 20 years, with the first 10 years to be served in prison and the remainder on probation.
- On May 6, Holland entered a non-negotiated guilty plea to the same three RICO charges. The Defense recommended a probated sentence, and the State recommended a sentence of 20 years, with the first 10 years to be served in prison and the remainder on probation. Judge Davis sentenced Holland to 20 years, with the first 10 years to be served in prison.
- Both defendants were ordered to pay a total of \$134,951.86 in restitution, which reflects the remaining balance after the value of recovered merchandise was deducted from the total theft amount.
- Special conditions of probation include no contact of any kind with each other, a ban from all Walmart and Target locations, prohibition from entering Cherokee County, and a requirement to complete 320 hours of community service.

The RICO Act

Georgia's Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act penalizes organized crime that is motivated by pecuniary gain or economic or physical threat or injury. Crimes charged under the RICO Act typically involve two or more defendants acting together as an "enterprise" to carry out a common scheme or motive to effectuate the crimes. Georgia's RICO Act allows prosecutors to charge defendants for the crimes they commit not only statewide, but nationwide as well.

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The Office of the District Attorney for the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit is committed to seeking justice, acting with integrity, and collaborating with partner agencies in the criminal justice system in order to protect the citizens of Cherokee County and the State of Georgia.

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