



# Department of Justice

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District of Rhode Island

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## **Former Postal Employee Sentenced to Federal Prison in Mail Theft Conspiracy**

*Erick Vera-Garzon participated in a conspiracy to steal and sell U.S. Treasury checks and gift cards while employed as a mail-sorter at the Providence Processing and Distribution Center*

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – Erick Vera-Garzon, 36, of Providence, was sentenced today to 36 months in federal prison for his role in a conspiracy to steal U.S. Treasury checks from the mail and either sell them on the street or deposit them in bank accounts opened with stolen or fraudulent personal information. The bank funds were then withdrawn or used to make retail purchases with the use of debit cards.

An investigation by the Providence Police Department Intelligence and Organized Crime Unit and the United States Postal Service (USPS) Office of Inspector General (OIG) resulted in the seizure of approximately \$1.6 million dollars worth of stolen U.S. Treasury checks, dozens of stolen gift cards, and more than \$165,000 in proceeds gained as a result of the sale of stolen checks and gift cards.

At sentencing, U.S. District Court Chief Judge William E. Smith also ordered Vera-Garzon to serve two years supervised release upon completion of his prison term. Vera-Garzon pleaded guilty on September 23, 2015, to conspiracy, theft of mail and theft of public money or property.

Vera-Garzon's sentence is announced by United States Attorney Peter F. Neronha, Providence Police Chief Colonel Hugh T. Clements, Jr. and Eileen Neff, Special Agent in Charge of the United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General, Northeast Area Field Office.

Joan Manuel Mustafa, 28, of Providence, a former co-worker of Vera-Garzon, pleaded guilty on October 21, 2015, to conspiracy, theft of mail and theft of public money or property. He is scheduled to be sentenced by U.S. District Court Chief Judge William E. Smith on January 8, 2016.

According to court documents and information presented to the court, in September 2014, USPS-OIG agents began investigating the disappearance of U.S. Treasury checks addressed to individuals in Rhode Island and nearby Massachusetts. The missing checks were handled by employees at the U.S. Mail Providence Processing and Distribution Center. At the same time, independent of the USPS-OIG investigation, a Providence Police Department detective developed information that Vera-Garzon was selling stolen U.S. Treasury checks at 20% of face value to buyers on the streets of Rhode Island and New York. The investigation determined that many of the stolen checks were deposited in bank accounts that had been opened in Rhode Island, Massachusetts and New York in the names of some of the individuals whose checks had gone missing. The funds were then drawn down by cash withdrawals from ATMs, the purchase of goods and services, and the purchase of money orders.

Based on the information developed by the Providence Police Department Intelligence and Organized Crime Unit, court authorized search warrants were obtained and executed at Mustafa and Vera-Garzon's residences on April 16, 2015. Law enforcement seized more than 900 stolen U.S. Treasury checks valued at approximately \$1.6 million dollars, several dozen gift cards and more than \$53,000 in cash. Vera-Garzon and Mustafa were arrested on April 16, 2015.

The cases are being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Gerard B. Sullivan and Richard W. Rose.

Agents from the Veterans Administration Office of Inspector General and the U.S. Treasury Office of Inspector General assisted agents from the United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General and detectives from the Providence Police Intelligence and Organized Crime Unit in the investigation of this matter.

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