



MEDIA RELEASE

Investigative Unit

Ohio Investigative Unit • Robert W. Booker Jr., Executive Director
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LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS INVESTIGATING A CLEVELAND FOOD MART'S ROLE IN FOOD STAMP FRAUD

(Columbus) – A search warrant was executed Thursday at a Cleveland business after undercover agents from the Ohio Investigative Unit (OIU) received a complaint that Yousef Abdel Aziz, also known as Tom's Food Market, allowed the purchase of alcohol and tobacco products, and gave cash in exchange for electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards.

Criminal charges are pending and administrative violations were issued to the liquor permit premise located at 4324 Warner Rd. The violations include:

- Nine counts of trafficking in EBT card;
- Nine counts of illegal use of EBT card;
- Nine counts of theft;
- Four counts of illegal possession of EBT and
- One count of drug paraphernalia possession.

"The real victims of food stamp fraud are the children who depend on the nutrition these cards are supposed to provide," said Cleveland Agent-in-Charge John Campbell. "Taxpayers are also victims of this type of criminal activity since they provide the funding to make nutritious meals available to children who need it the most."

Often the schemes involve the permit premise paying the customer cash for the EBT cards for a fraction of their value and redeeming the food credits to purchase allowable goods at their full amount. The goods are then resold in the store or even used for personal consumption.

Administrative charges are filed against the liquor permit and will be forwarded to the Liquor Control Commission. Possible administrative penalties could include fines, suspension or revocation of the liquor permit.

Officials from the United States Department of Agriculture also assisted with the investigation and the search warrant execution.

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The Ohio Investigative Unit is a division of the Ohio Department of Public Safety. Agents are undercover sworn peace officers who enforce the state's liquor and tobacco laws, as well as food stamp fraud. Individuals who believe food stamp fraud is being committed are encouraged to contact OIU toll-free at 1-877-4MINORS. All complaints will remain anonymous.