

## **IMPORTANT ALERT: SURGE IN MAIL THEFT**

On February 27, 2023, the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) issued an alert regarding a nationwide surge in mail theft-related check fraud schemes targeting the U.S. Mail. Fraud, including check fraud, is the largest source of illicit proceeds in the United States and represents one of the most significant money laundering threats to the United States.

Criminals committing mail theft-related check fraud generally target the U.S. Mail to steal personal checks, business checks and tax refund checks. Criminals will generally steal all types of checks as part of a mail theft scheme, but business checks may be more valuable because business accounts are often well-funded, and it may take longer for the victim to notice the fraud. These criminals target USPS blue collection boxes, unsecured residential mailboxes and privately owned cluster box units at apartment complexes and commercial buildings.

After stealing checks from the U.S. Mail, fraudsters and organized criminal groups may alter or “wash” the checks, replacing the payee information with their own or fraudulent identities or with business accounts that the criminals control. Criminals may also rely on money mules and their pre-existing accounts to deposit fraudulent checks.

### **Tips to Avoid Being Victimized:**

1. Drop off outgoing mail inside a physical post office location.
2. Do not leave incoming or outgoing mail sitting in your mailbox for an extended period or overnight.
3. If you choose to leave outgoing mail in your mailbox, do not put up the flag.
4. Sign up for USPS Informed Delivery.
5. Utilize electronic payment methods rather than physical check-writing.
6. Review bank account transactions daily, including cleared check images to ensure they have not been altered.
7. Business owners should proactively enroll business bank accounts in banks' Positive Pay programs.

