



# BCPO News

**Scott A. Coffina, Prosecutor**



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**August 28, 2017**

## **Three Arrested, \$450k Seized, as Money Laundering Operation Taken Down**

*Investigation reveals illegal construction finance scheme involving millions of dollars*

**MOUNT HOLLY** - Burlington County Prosecutor Scott Coffina and Cinnaminson Township Public Safety Director Michael P. King announced that a nine-month investigation into a money laundering operation has resulted in three arrests and the seizure of approximately \$450,000 in cash and deposited funds, along with nine vehicles, three motorcycles and a collection of 30 high-end watches.

The investigation began in November 2016, when officers from the Cinnaminson Township Police Department suspected an illegal check cashing operation was being run out of a business located at 803 South Route 130 known as MAIA Consulting.

Search warrants were executed August 24 at MAIA Consulting as well as the residences of three co-conspirators and a self-storage facility. Several bank accounts were seized, as well as the contents of a safety deposit box.

The investigation revealed that MAIA Consulting was used by multiple construction companies along the East Coast to conceal payments to undocumented workers in the construction industry. A review of records of multiple bank accounts and financial transactions occurring since early 2015 revealed that several individuals using 803 South Route 130 as an operations base have laundered up to \$100 million through an elaborate, illegal check cashing scheme.

The operation involved MAIA Consulting cashing checks that were issued to "shell" construction companies, which only existed on paper for the purpose of furthering the illegal scheme. Those shell companies were utilized by construction subcontractors who employed undocumented workers. This scenario allowed the subcontractors to avoid labor reporting regulations as well as tax obligations and insurance requirements.

For its part, MAIA Consulting received a percentage of the checks that were cashed. Furthermore, Renato Maia Da Silva, the owner of MAIA Consulting, and his co-conspirators orchestrated the management and creation of their own shell construction companies, which allowed them to further profit by renting out the names of construction companies they control and the accompanying insurance policies.

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The profits obtained from the scheme were quickly deposited into and withdrawn from bank accounts held by other shell companies that existed in name only. This was a further attempt to hide the origins of the funds, and make the money appear to have been earned from legitimate sources, as well as to mask the identities of the recipients.

This investigation is ongoing. It is suspected that multiple construction companies, general contractors and subcontractors are involved. Additional arrests are anticipated.

“This is not a victimless crime,” Prosecutor Coffina said. “These illegal financial transactions have increased the costs of construction in our area, deprived multiple government bodies of needed tax revenue, and placed some of our most vulnerable construction workers at peril from injuries that occur on the job. I’d like to acknowledge in particular our Financial Crimes Unit and the Cinnaminson Police Department for their painstaking efforts in recognizing this complex money laundering operation and building the case supporting the asset seizures and charges we have filed against the defendants perpetrating this scheme, and also thank our other law enforcement partners involved in this operation.”

Da Silva, 51, of the Camelot Apartments at Cinnaminson Harbor, was charged with Financial Facilitation of Criminal Activity (First Degree), which is more commonly known as money laundering.

Wesley Dos Santos, 33, of the 300 block of Berkeley Avenue in Palmyra, was also charged with Financial Facilitation of Criminal Activity (First Degree), as was Lucas Alves, 34, of the 100 block of Helen Drive in Cinnaminson. Search warrants were executed at all three residences.

Da Silva was taken into custody at his business, while Dos Santos and Alves were arrested at their residences. A detention hearing will be held Tuesday in Superior Court. All three men are in the United States illegally from Brazil. Their cases are being reviewed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security/Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The majority of the cash seized during the operation was discovered inside the consulting business. The vehicles that were seized included a fully-restored 1967 Pontiac CP Tempest GTO.

The ongoing investigation is being conducted by the Burlington County Prosecutor’s Office Financial Crimes Unit, Cinnaminson Township Police Department, New Jersey Division of Criminal Justice, New Jersey Division of Taxation, New Jersey State Police, Palmyra Borough Police Department, U.S. Department of Homeland Security/Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

Anyone with information about these defendants or this case that might be beneficial to investigators is urged to call the Burlington County Prosecutor’s Office at 609-265-5035 and ask to speak to a detective in the Financial Crimes Unit.

*All persons are considered innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.*

**END**