

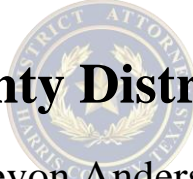
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DA's Office Warns of "Felony Lane Gang"

Organized group steals purses and identities of victims

District Attorney Devon Anderson today warned the public about a growing trend that is now targeting Harris County residents. A group of men steal purses and then commit various identity theft crimes with stolen checks and driver's licenses. The "Felony Lane Gang" started in Florida and is now in Houston. It is estimated that the thieves make anywhere from \$10,000 to \$20,000 per week.

The victims are primarily women. Often times, these thieves go to cemeteries where women, who are attending funerals or visiting burial sites, have left their purse in their car.

"Identity thieves are constantly thinking of new ways to steal identities," said DA Anderson. "Our office will prosecute those responsible for these crimes. However, prevention and awareness are key to stopping the thieves from victimizing our citizens."

The gang's leaders recruit men to break into cars. These individuals primarily target purses and strike in places such as cemeteries and day cares. Gang leaders then recruit women to forge the stolen checks. The thieves often write checks for amounts around \$1,000. The FBI has labeled the group, "The Felony Lane Gang", because they use the farthest drive-through teller lane in order to avoid detection when withdrawing money from the victim's account.

"In this particular scheme, the thieves are looking for something they can grab quickly from your car," said Ed McClees, Chief of the Organized Crime Section. "The best advice is to not leave anything in your car. Always take your purse or wallet with you no matter where you are, and be aware of your surroundings. You can never be too careful."

The Harris County District Attorney's Office, the Houston Police Department, the Harris County Precinct 5 Constable's Office and the FBI are actively investigating these criminal organizations.

If you are a victim or have information that can help catch the thieves, please call your local law enforcement agency.