

NEWS RELEASE

Alabama Department of Public Safety

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Troopers Arrest Driver License Applicant on Forgery Charge, *Applicant's False ID Linked to Alleged Scam*

BIRMINGHAM — Alabama state troopers arrested a man Monday after he made fraudulent application for a driver license using identification documents connected to an alleged identify theft scam investigation in Chattanooga. Thirty-year-old Lakeity Gene Keller was charged with second-degree forgery and is being held at the Jefferson County Jail under no bond.

When Keller applied for an Alabama driver license, he presented as his own a valid Tennessee driver license, Tennessee birth certificate and Social Security card. Driver license staff noted that Keller's physical characteristics did not match the information on the Tennessee documents, according to Department of Public Safety Director Col. Mike Coppage.

"Our troopers then contacted Tennessee and learned that earlier this month, the true owner of the documents had filed a report with the Chattanooga Police Department claiming to be the victim of an identity theft scam," Coppage said.

Alabama troopers learned the man had responded to advertisements announcing job interviews for employment with "Def Jam" nightclubs to be opened in Nashville, Atlanta and Miami. The man went to a Chattanooga hotel to apply for one of the jobs and provided his driver license, birth certificate and Social Security card.

"There were no nightclub jobs, however, and the subject conducting the 'interviews' collected identification from more than 100 applicants before disappearing," said Coppage.

Coppage praised driver license personnel and troopers for their diligence in arresting Keller, and he issued a warning to Alabamians. "This case clearly underscores the value of a driver license and the need to guard against driver license fraud and identity theft," he said.

"When we ensure the integrity of the driver license system, we protect individuals, the banking and retail industries, and help ensure homeland security."

Leaders of the Alabama Retail Association and Alabama Bankers Association echoed the importance of a safe and secure driver licensing system.

"Alabama retailers applaud Alabama's driver license examiners and state troopers today for in essence stopping countless robberies before they happened," said Alabama Retail Association President Rick Brown. "That's what identification fraud is - robbery. Nationally, it costs \$50 billion annually. Retailers are grateful to have such diligent workers on the frontline every day protecting the identities of our citizens."

The chief executive officer of the Alabama Bankers Association, Dan Bailey, said, "We applaud the efforts of the Alabama state troopers in combating the tremendous problems caused by identity theft for individuals, as well as for the banking industry.

"The Alabama Bankers Association proudly presents a quarterly award and a trooper of the year award to the top investigator in the Alabama state troopers fraud investigation unit," said Bailey. "The association also was proud to work jointly with the Attorney General's Office in passing legislation which provided stronger penalties for offenders of this crime."

Coppage said the investigation is continuing.

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for more information contact:

Public Information/Education • P.O. Box 1511 • Montgomery AL 36102-1511

(334) 242-4445 • <http://www.dps.state.al.us/>