

Village chase ends in wreck and two charged



Billy Farra

see Chase pg. 2



Kiersten Almond

Man charged after continual problems in GB



John Druge

see DV pg. 3

Victim attacked and then charged with outstanding warrants Assailant also charged



Misty Donovan

see Two pg. 3

Capias served for TennCare Fraud x2



Jennifer Rodriguez-Howard

See Fraud P.5

Asylum Seekers Extorted Men Sentenced for Scheme Targeting New Immigrants

It was easy for the criminals to spot their targets as buses offloaded passengers into the din of New York City's Port Authority bus terminal. The men looked for people who had recently entered the United States to seek asylum—distinguishable by the monitoring bands on their ankles or the immigration paperwork they held in their hands. Francisco Betancourt, Pascual Rodriguez, or Lucilo Cabrera would then move in on these vulnerable individuals.

See Asylum P.4



Verse of the Day

You were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the

praise of his glory. —Ephesians 1:13-14

Wazzup

How about those Tennessee Titans? Did anyone even think they would make it this far?

Weather

Today: Rain. High of 71F.

Tonight: Rain. Low of 62F
Thursday: Rain. High of 63F.

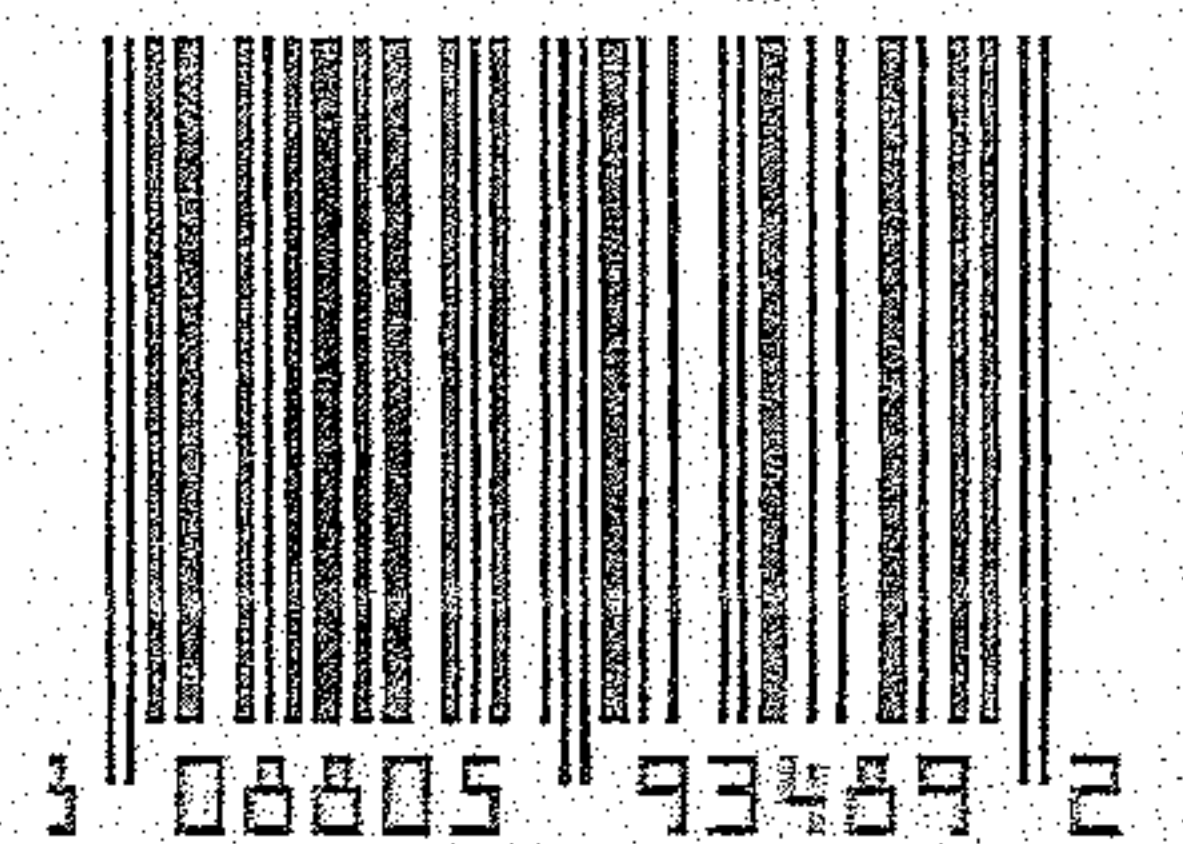
Tuesday night: Rain. Low of 40F

Horoscopes

Capricorn 12/22-01/19
Breaking down a large project into manageable

steps is your secret to success. Although you may be wearing your emotions on your sleeve today, you should be able to maintain a positive attitude. But your current optimistic take on the world is not

(Continued on page 6)



Chase

Keirsten Almond, 23, Sas-safras Way Maryville, was charged with Mfg/Del/Sale or Poss. Of Meth, and Simple Possession.

Billy Farra, 27, Monte Wood Circle Pigeon Forge, was charged with Reckless Endangerment x2, Evading Arrest, Driving without a valid License, Reckless Driving, Speeding 21 MPH over Limit, Traffic Control Device, and Driv-

ing on Roadway laned for Traffic.

Deputy W. Jenkins was involved in a pursuit beginning on East Coast Tellico Pkwy. The vehicle was gaining distance on Deputy well above the speed limit. Deputy attempted to traffic stop the vehicle before the train tracks on East Coast Tellico Pkwy. The vehicle kept driving recklessly over the tracks. When the vehi-

cle landed on the other side hicle continued onto Old of the tracks sparks came Hwy 72, reaching 80 mph. from the vehicle due to The vehicle wrecked strik- the jump. The vehicle then ing an embankment. Dep- drove through a stop sign uty detained the driver Bil- showing no due regards ly Farra. The driver stated for other drivers. The ve- Chase ctd. to P. 3

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Chase ctd from P.2

he ran cause he saw Deputy and that he had been smoking marijuana earlier. The driver was transported to UT due to injuries. Keirsten Almond and a male was a passenger in the vehicle. Almond was airlifted to UT, the other passenger was transported to UT also. THP worked the wreck portion of the pursuit and was conducting an inventory of the vehicle prior to towing. Almond kept asking Trooper to give her purse to her.

While Trooper was going through the bag he located a green leafy substance believed to be marijuana. Trooper turned the marijuana over to Deputy. Deputy continued to search the bag n located a container containing .48 grams of a narcotic believed to be meth.

This was the only bag in the vehicle containing female products.

Almond was the only fe-

male in the vehicle. Billy Farra and Keirsten Almond were arrested after released from the hospital.

DV

John Druge, 55, Eugene Disney Lane Greenback, was charged with Domestic Assault. Deputy W. Jenkins LCSO, was dispatched to Eugene Disney Lane in reference to an unwanted guest. On scene Deputy made contact with the complainant, who advised that John Druge had been drinking and causing problems in the home by continuing to go into the complainant's daughter room after being instructed not to. Deputy then spoke with the victim who advised that Druge had grabbed her during an argument and slammed her on the bed of the witness. This put the victim in fear.

Druge was gone on

Deputies arrival. Deputy was dispatched later back to Disney Lane, Druge had show back up under the influence arguing with people at the residence.

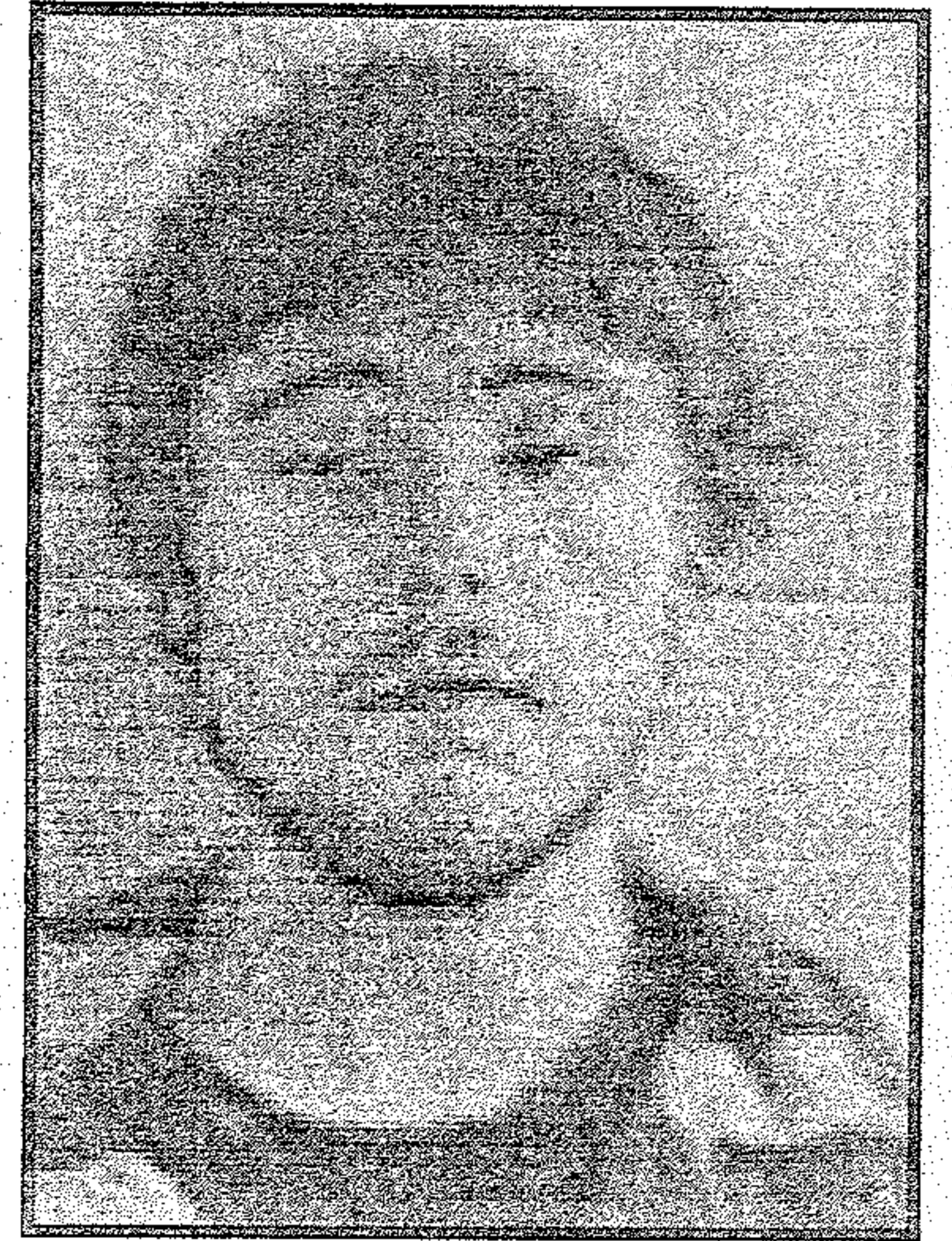
Deputy arrived on scene and made contact with John Druge who had a strong odor of an alcoholic beverage about his person, bloodshot watery eyes, and slurred speech. John Druge was placed under arrest and transported to the Loudon County Jail.

DV

Misty Donavan, 28, Highway 321 N. Lenoir City, was charged with Domestic Assault.

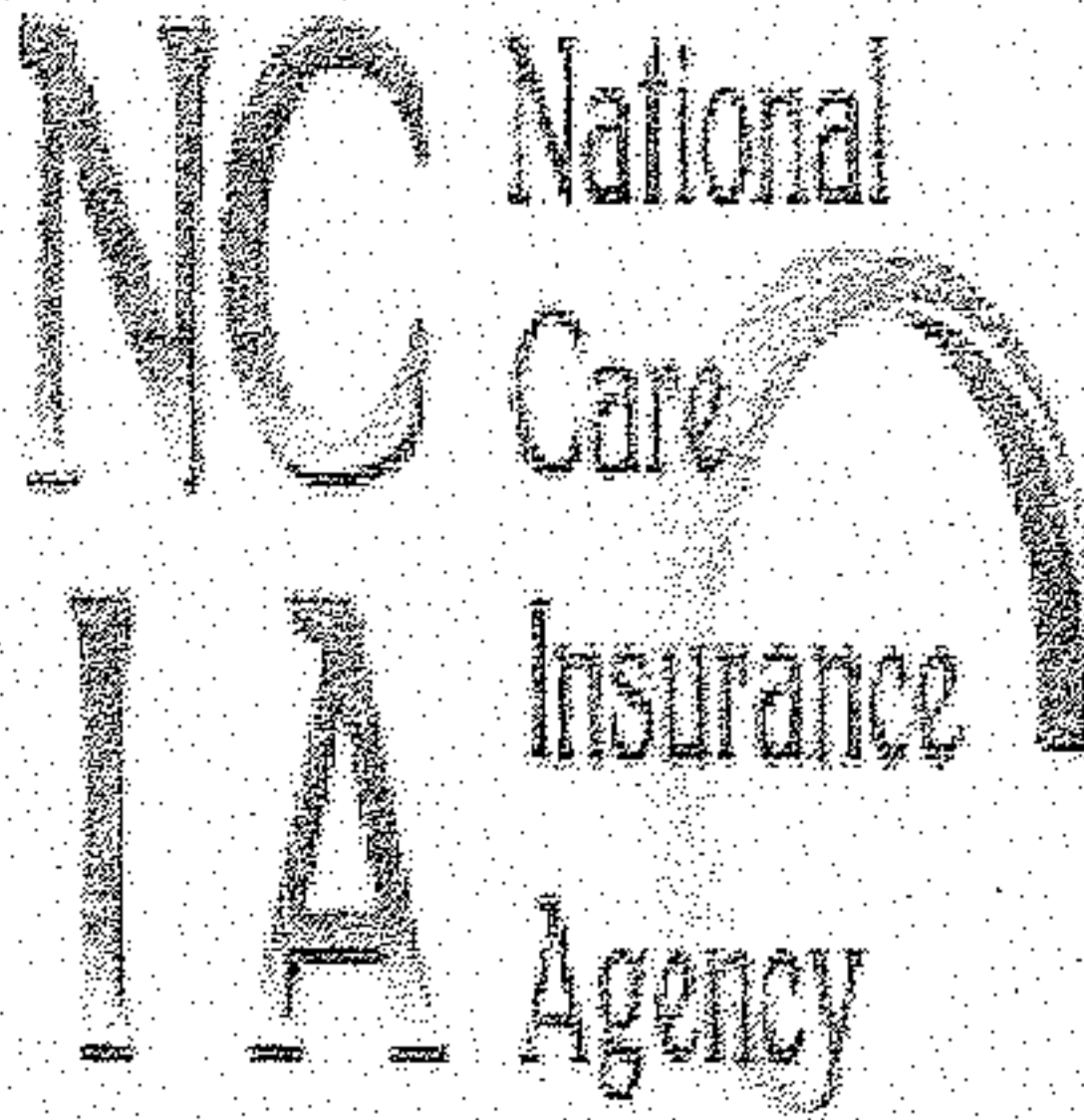
Dakota Johnson, 24, Hwy 321 N Lenoir City, was charged with General Session Capias x2.

Officer C. Watson LCPD, responded to Hwy 321 N. in reference to a domestic disturbance. Upon arrival Officer made contact with Misty Donovan in a room. Officer made contact with the victim outside the



Dakota Johnson

room with blood running down his face. Victim stated that him and Donovan were in an argument and victim turned to go outside and smoke. Donovan then threw a cell phone and hit victim in the face causing a laceration. Victim ask a witness to call police. Officer identified the victim as Dakota Johnson who has 2 active warrant out of General Session Court. After an investigation it was determined that Misty Donovan did intentionally cause harm to Johnson and was placed under arrest. Dakota Johnson was placed under arrest for 2 active warrants.



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Asylum

viduals. Rodriguez sometimes claimed to be an immigration official; the others claimed to be helpful strangers. In all events, the men would extort money from these newcomers by making up fees or forcing them to accept unnecessary services. Their most common scheme involved forcing victims into an unneeded and unwanted taxi ride from drivers who were also involved in the plot.

Many of the victims were sent on harrowing, hours-long car rides and were held until their family members could scrape together enough money to pay an exorbitant fare—often more than \$1,000.

“They knew they were able to take advantage of these victims,” said Assistant U.S. Attorney Vanessa Richards, who prosecuted the case for the District of Connecticut. She explained that be-

cause the victims were hoping to have their petitions for asylum or entry into the country accepted, there was tremendous fear that any interaction with law enforcement put them at risk. So the perpetrators “knew their victims would not call the police,” she said.

The crimes were only uncovered because one individual reached out to police after being victimized by Betancourt and Cabrera and hearing about another new immigrant experiencing the same scheme years later. “This brave woman came forward to tell us: ‘I think something really bad is happening here, and it’s been going on for a long time,’” Richards said.

That person’s tip and the subsequent investigation led to the arrests and convictions of Betancourt, Rodriguez, and Cabrera, as well as one of the drivers, Carlos Hernandez. Each was sentenced

to serve between eight and 14 years in prison for kidnapping and extortion in a scheme they had been running for years.

“They knew they were able to take advantage of these victims.”

Assistant U.S. Attorney Vanessa Richards, District of Connecticut

“They would put people in the taxis and drive for hours—they would drive through Pennsylvania before going to Connecticut—and relatives were told they had to pay for that taxi fare,” said FBI Special Agent Jennifer Wagner, who investigated this case from the New Haven Field Office. She said people were forced to borrow money from neighbors and friends or go with the criminals to an ATM to get enough money to pay for the safe return of the victim.

“The fact that they were knocking on the doors of neigh-

bors late at night shows how afraid these family members were for the victims,” stressed Richards.

The court paperwork told the chilling story of one woman from Honduras who, with her two small children, entered the U.S. at the Texas border and applied for asylum. Immigration authorities gave her permission to travel to Connecticut to stay with her sister until her asylum hearing.

When she arrived in New York City to board a connect-

ing bus to Connecticut, Bentancourt approached her and insisted there was no bus to Connecticut, but that he would help her. He then took her bus ticket, grabbed the arm of her small son, and asked for the phone number of a family member.

Betancourt called the victim’s sister and said the victim and her children had ended up in upstate New York, not New York City, and no bus to Connecticut was available. He would put them in a taxi for about \$3 per

Asylum ctd. to p. 5

Public Notice

Loudon County Commission will hold a Special Called Meeting on January 21st at 6:00 at the County Office Building to discuss the ambulance contract, money allotment for study on new Annex placement, MOU between Loudon County and Lenoir City and TDOT Resolution. Workshop to follow.

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Asylum ctd. from P.4

mile, he told the sister. The victim's sister explained that she didn't have money for a taxi ride. She pleaded with Betancourt to tell her where her sister and the children were so she could drive to get them. Betancourt hung up on her.

The victim and her children were then brought by subway to Hernandez's waiting car. Hernandez took the woman's immigration paperwork and identification and drove the family slowly to Connecticut. He ultimately demanded \$900 from the victims' family members to drop her at an agreed upon meeting place.

After the family was only able to pay him \$700, Hernandez locked himself inside the car with the victim's older child and insisted the family pay another \$100 to free the child and reclaim the victim's immigration

paperwork. The family was forced to go with Hernandez to an ATM to withdraw the additional \$100.

Despite their fears about speaking to FBI agents about what they had been through, a number of victims provided details and identified the perpetrators. Wagner said that cell phone data was also instrumental in proving the case. After applying for warrants to view the suspects' cell phone records, investigators could see an incriminating pattern of regular calls and text messages among the co-conspirators and then a cluster of phone calls to their victims' family members on a single day.

Additional evidence, such as surveillance photos from ATMs and banks, helped solidify the case.

Richards said the long sentences the perpetrators received reflect the seriousness of their crimes and the length of time they had been victimizing people.

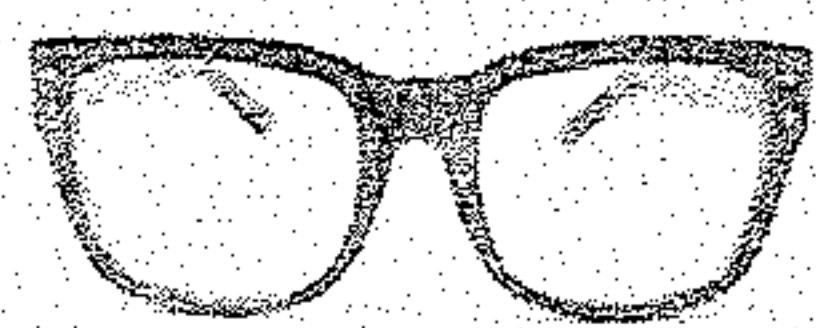
"It is important for everyone to know that law enforcement is looking after you regardless of your immigration status," said Wagner. "Something will be done to the people who break the law."

Fraud

Jennifer Rodriguez-Howard, 43, N. High Street Sweetwater, was charged with Criminal Court Capias (tncare fraud-participant x2). Jennifer was served with a Criminal Court Capias at the Loudon County Jail.

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There will be a Loudon County Public Records Commission Meeting

5:00 p.m.,
 Tuesday, January 14, 2020
 Loudon County Office Building