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NEWS RELEASE –

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RINGLEADER PLEADS GUILTY IN AREA HOME IMPROVEMENT STORE THEFTS CRIMINAL ENTERPRISE

The ringleader of an alleged criminal enterprise involving the theft of over \$35,000 of merchandise from Denver metro area/Front Range home improvement stores pleaded guilty last Friday and will be sentenced in June.

Christopher Rodriguez (dob: 07-16-1986) pleaded guilty to the main charge of violation of the *Colorado Organized Crime Control Act-COCCA* (F2). Per the terms of his plea, Rodriguez is expected to be sentenced to 16 years in prison.

A Denver Grand Jury last October indicted Rodriguez and 24 co-defendants on various additional charges, including *money laundering* (F3), *theft* (F4, F6 and M1), and *violation of bail bond conditions* (F6).

The indictment was the result of a months-long investigation and collaboration by the Denver District Attorney's Economic Crime Unit, Denver Metro Gang Task Force, Denver Police Department, Aurora Police Department, and the Lakewood Police Department. The Denver Sheriff's Department assisted with the apprehension of several of the defendants.

The indictment alleges that between December 2015 and December 2016, Rodriguez participated in and directed fellow members of the criminal enterprise in stealing merchandise from Home Depot and Lowe's stores, then returning the stolen items back to the stores for merchandise credit cards, which were in turn sold for cash to pay enterprise members in cash or drugs. Rodriguez allegedly provided room and board in Denver for some members of the enterprise and bonded associates out of jail and compelled them to work for him until they could repay the bond fee. The merchandise cards were sold at stores specializing in gift cards for about 70% of the merchandise credit card value.

At the time of many of the alleged incidents, Rodriguez was on bond under intensive supervision with electronic monitoring in connection with pending criminal cases against him. His electronic monitoring devices placed him at the scene of one or more store thefts for which he was charged.

Rodriguez is scheduled to be sentenced on June 8 at 8:30 a.m., in courtroom 5H.