

Report: FBI defied judge's orders when they seized cash and valuables in safety deposit boxes

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The Federal Bureau of Investigation misled a judge last year when it agreed not to permanently seize cash and goods during a raid at a safety deposit company in California last year, according to testimony from a former agent.

The witness, who was a senior FBI agent at the time of the raid, testified that the agency purposely misled US Magistrate Steve Kim last year when it agreed not to confiscate the contents of safety deposit boxes that held cash or goods valued at \$5,000 or more.

The raid was part of a criminal investigation into US Private Vaults, which was charged for conspiracy to traffic drugs and money laundering.

The private holders of the safety deposit boxes involved in the raid filed a class action lawsuit against the FBI, alleging the FBI violated their rights by confiscating their belongings in the raid. Court filings from the class action suit revealed the FBI's failure to disclose its intent to keep the contents of the boxes containing over \$5,000, violating Judge Kim's orders not to confiscate any evidence from the boxes.

“The government did not know what was in those boxes, who owned them, or what, if anything, those people had done,” wrote attorney for the box holders, Robert Frommer, in the court documents.

The FBI has argued the seizure of the items was justified because the items were tied to other unknown crimes. An FBI spokesperson told the LA Times the confiscations were lawful “based on allegations of widespread criminal wrongdoing. “At no time was a magistrate misled as to the probable cause used to obtain the warrants.”