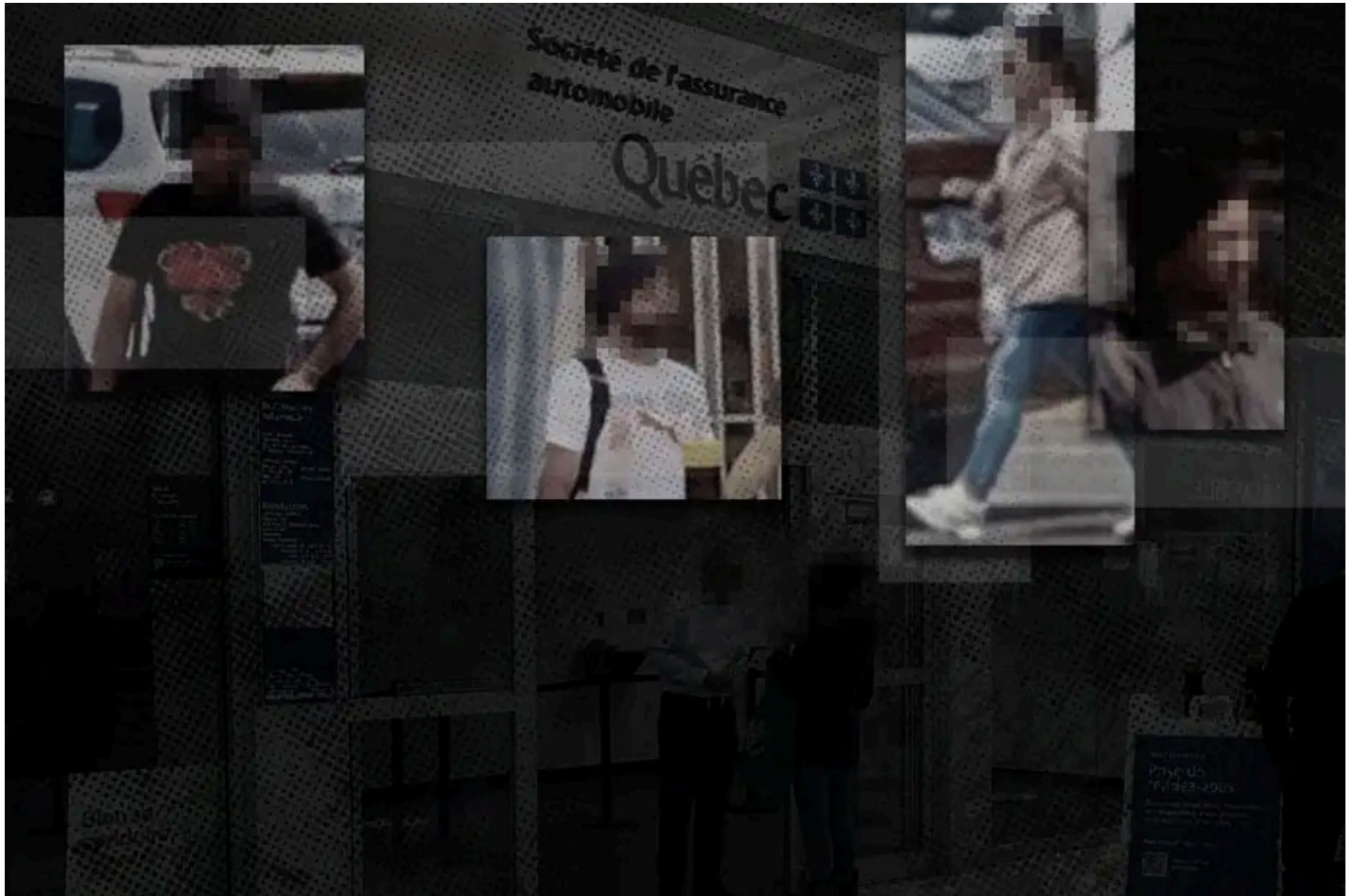


Fraudulently obtained driver's licenses

# "It's guaranteed, you're going to pass"



PHOTOMONTAGE LA PRESSE

During their investigation, police used surveillance, wiretapping, marked bank notes and undercover police.

**“No time to go to school and mess around!” they said. A criminal network infiltrated into the Société de l’assurance automobile du Québec (SAAQ) is alleged to have helped thousands of cheaters obtain their car or truck licence without demonstrating any driving skills. A security guard claims to have been threatened with a gun when he denounced the situation.**

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The Réflex driving school in Verdun seemed to have a miraculous effect on its students. Incurable dunces, who used to fail one after the other, suddenly excelled at the theoretical driving test.

An aspiring motorist who had previously scored 0% on the traffic sign test suddenly became an expert on road signs. Aspiring truckers who had received miserable grades, fluctuating between 5% and 35%, on their previous attempts turned into champions of the Highway Safety Code and obtained their class 1 heavy truck license with flying colors. A tour de force, while one of them had failed six times in the past.

Most of these students had one thing in common: they wore a head covering at the time of the theory exam. One of the future truckers, who arrived bareheaded at the SAAQ, had barely put on a turban before the exam. Another student had a toque shoved over his head by his teacher, while it was 33 degrees outside. A woman had presented herself with an Islamic headscarf.

These students, or their instructor from the Reflex school, strangely touched their ears before entering. Because this is where the key to their success was hidden: small wireless headphones such as AirPods, in which an accomplice whispered the answers.

## **A lucrative crime**

The scheme is described in affidavits by investigators from the Permanent Anti-Corruption Unit (UPAC) presented to a judge and obtained by *La Presse*.

At the end of October, UPAC announced the filing of criminal charges against six people, including the owner of the Réflex school, a former SAAQ road evaluator and a former counter attendant of the Crown corporation, in connection with a scheme to fraudulently obtain a driver's licence. The police say they seized more than \$1.1 million in cash from the members of the network.

**Steps have been taken to revoke the licences of more than 2000 alleged cheaters, mainly class 5 car licences, in addition to a few heavy truck licences. This is a “public safety” issue, the police force stressed.**

Thanks to hundreds of pages of unpublished court documents, *La Presse* can reveal for the first time the extent of the system of cheating and corruption that plagued some SAAQ branches between 2023 and 2024, according to the authorities. The investigators' allegations have not yet been tested in court.

In addition to the assessor and the counter attendant, the SAAQ confirmed to us that two other officials, including a team leader, were dismissed in connection with this file. Security guards from a private agency deemed too accommodating to cheaters were also declared ineligible to work for the Crown corporation.

The investigation showed that the criminal network operated mainly in a branch in Saint-Léonard, and sometimes in Ahuntsic-Cartierville and Laval.

**“No time to go to school and mess around”**

The police resorted to shadowing, wiretapping and marked banknotes during their investigation, but above all to undercover police officers who showed up at Réflex as customers and registered the owner, Mohammed Tarikul Islam.

Mr. Islam, who declined to answer our questions for this report, allegedly asked one of the infiltrators for \$3,500 to obtain a driver's license quickly, with guaranteed success in the theory and practical tests.

"It's guaranteed, you're going to pass," Islam said on the recording.

No need to wait months for an appointment, like the average person. "I know the guy. You're going to pay and you're going to be able to get in," said the boss.

He also offered a false certificate of driving lessons. "I'll say that you started with me in February and that you did all your blocks of classes," he explained. No time to go to school and mess around. »

He pointed out that other driving schools were not as accommodating. "If you go to Tecnic, they would never do that," he said.

For his theory test at the SAAQ office in Saint-Léonard, the undercover police officer was given two phones hidden in a backpack, each connected to a wireless earphone.



PHOTO MARTIN TREMBLAY, LA PRESSE

The SAAQ branch in Saint-Léonard

Following the instructions of Mohammed Tarikul Islam, he sat down at an SAAQ computer connected to a headset so that he could hear the exam questions. His wireless headphones hidden under the headset relayed the questions to the accomplices of the Reflex school, hidden in the parking lot, who dictated the answers to him live.

When a question referred to an image on the screen, his interlocutors suggested a series of possibilities: is it an umbrella? A blue car? A motorcycle? The officer had to cough when they mentioned the right image. They could then guide him as to the answer.

The agent passed the test and was invited to return to take his road test at the same branch. Everything was arranged so that he had the right evaluator on the road: Gregory Malyszko, the accomplice of the network, according to the investigation.



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Left: Mohammed Tarikul Islam, head of the Reflex driving school. Right: Gregory Malyszko, former SAAQ road evaluator.

In the middle of a road test, the undercover officer's phone rang. Feigning panic, he unfastened his seatbelt, took out his cell phone and started talking on the phone. Gregory Malyszko told him that this was a reason for failure, but passed him anyway.

### **Allegations of threats and intimidation**

Court documents reveal that a security guard, who had been caught providing the Réflex school with coupons to cut the line and go directly to the counter, eventually agreed to cooperate with the investigation. He provided crucial information about the

"The branch manager had suspicions. As a security guard, he asked me what I was seeing. I told him, that's it. I did some investigations. I always stayed in front of the door, I watched," security guard Clothier Toupuissant told *La Presse*.

Mr. Toupuissant says that at the time, the distribution of coupons to cut the line was a common practice. The catastrophic implementation of the SAAQclic computerized system had plunged the Crown corporation into chaos. There were sometimes 400 people in line as early as 7 a.m. at the Saint-Léonard branch.

"They spat in my face," the security guard recalled. "Everything I went through for \$19 an hour... The coupons made it possible to give priority to certain customers to settle emergencies or disputes, he says.

The former guard says that some SAAQ employees took a liking to him when he denounced cheating and corruption. Officials reportedly ordered him to stay out of the branch from now on. Then, the intimidation went up a notch, he says. "When I started talking to the manager, they broke the window of my car."

One day, he blocked the entrance to a customer suspected of being involved in the cheating system. "I knew he was coming to do something. He told me: "OK, I'm waiting for you outside." When I got out in the parking lot, we pulled out a gun," he says.

« A gun was pointed at me at the SAAQ in front of everyone. »

— Clothier Toupuissant

Although he cooperated with the investigation, he later lost his position with the security firm that employed him because of allegations of favouritism in the management of queues.

## Keeping the roads safe

The SAAQ told *La Presse* that it takes "very seriously" the allegations of threats against the former guard. "We have forwarded this information to UPAC, which is leading the criminal investigation in this case," said the Crown corporation's spokesman, Simon-Pierre Poulin.

Regarding cheating in exams, the organization points out that it carries out nearly 9 million interactions and transactions with its customers each year and admits that "on this colossal volume of interactions, there is always a possibility of wrongdoing."

"There is no such thing as zero risk. We must remain vigilant and we invite anyone to report a suspicious situation without delay. Our teams are ready: all our telephone customer service representatives have been trained to receive and process reports," says Mr. Poulin. Various measures to curb cheating have been put in place since last year, he added.

"Ultimately, the rules surrounding obtaining driver's licences exist to protect the public and ensure that our roads remain safe. This is fundamental and it is the SAAQ's primary mission," says the spokesperson.

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