

**Department of Justice**  
U.S. Attorney's Office  
Southern District of New York

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Brooklyn Woman Pleads Guilty To COVID-19 Fraud Scheme And To Separate Fraud Against NYCHA**

CHANETTE LEWIS Conspired to Commit Pandemic Fraud by, Among Other Things,  
Defrauding New York City's COVID-19 Hotel Room Isolation Program and Perpetrated a  
Separate Fraud Scheme Against the New York City Housing Authority

Damian Williams, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that CHANETTE LEWIS pled guilty today to two counts of conspiracy to commit wire fraud. LEWIS participated in a scheme to commit COVID-19 pandemic fraud by, among other things, defrauding New York City's COVID-19 Hotel Room Isolation Program. LEWIS also committed a fraud in which she submitted fabricated documents to the New York City Housing Authority ("NYCHA") — such as purported Orders of Protection bearing Judges' names, purported letters from a District Attorney, and purported letters from healthcare professionals attesting to alleged medical issues — in order to secure public housing benefits for herself and her customers. LEWIS pled guilty before United States Magistrate Judge Stewart D. Aaron. LEWIS's case is assigned to United States District Judge Lewis A. Kaplan.

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said: "Chanette Lewis took advantage of multiple lifelines offered to New York City residents in need during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of her schemes misappropriated identifying information of hardworking individuals, including medical professionals whose services were vital during the pandemic. For her brazen crimes, Lewis now faces possible prison time."

According to the allegations contained in the Superseding Information, court filings, and statements made during plea proceedings:

### LEWIS's COVID-19 Pandemic Fraud Scheme

From April 2020 through September 2021, LEWIS conspired to commit COVID-19 pandemic fraud by, among other things, defrauding the COVID-19 Hotel Room Isolation Program (the "Program"). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, New York City created the Program. Funded by New York City and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Program provided free hotel rooms for qualifying individuals throughout New York City. The Program was open to (a) healthcare workers who needed to isolate because of exposure to COVID-19; (b) patients who had tested positive for COVID-19; (c) individuals who believed, based on their symptoms, that they were infected with COVID-19; and (d) individuals who lived with someone who contracted COVID-19. As stated on the City's website describing the Program, such individuals "may qualify to self-isolate in a hotel, free of charge, for up to 14 days if you do not have a safe place to self-isolate." Those who wished to book a hotel room through the Program could either call a phone number or use an online hotel booking platform.

LEWIS defrauded the Program in several respects. First, she secured free Program hotel rooms for herself by falsely claiming to be a healthcare worker. Second, she sold at least approximately 1,936

nights' worth of fraudulently obtained hotel rooms to customers who were ineligible for the Program. Third, LEWIS abused her employment, which was supposed to be in service of the Program. Specifically, LEWIS worked at a call center that handled phone calls and certain reservations for the Program for several months in 2020. LEWIS was hired specifically for the Program, and as a result of her employment, she had access to legitimate healthcare workers' identifying information. LEWIS abused her position, including by misappropriating healthcare workers' identifying information, revealing the Program's inner workings to co-conspirators, and making unauthorized sales of Program hotel rooms to ineligible individuals. For instance, LEWIS sold a co-defendant, for \$800, personal identifying information of at least five healthcare professionals, as well as certain "codes" to use when booking hotel reservations through the Program, such as an employee ID number and license number. LEWIS admitted, in Facebook messages, that she had stolen doctors' identifying information in furtherance of the scheme, writing: "I work for 311 oem [*i.e.*, the Office of Emergency Management] that how I got doctors licenses and stuff . . . I work in the part that I collect they information and I do and approval the booking . . . I take doctors and stuff certificate numbers and stuff." LEWIS also advertised to potential customers that, when hotels asked for a healthcare worker's identification, LEWIS would supply a purported paystub and a letter falsely asserting that the individual was a healthcare worker.

#### LEWIS's Fraud against NYCHA

From in or around July 2020 until October 2021, LEWIS participated in a conspiracy to defraud NYCHA. LEWIS submitted fabricated documents to NYCHA — such as purported Orders of Protection bearing Judges' names, purported letters from a District Attorney, and purported letters from doctors attesting to alleged medical issues — in order to secure public housing benefits for both herself and others, such as transfers to larger NYCHA apartments. In total, LEWIS submitted fraudulent applications to NYCHA on behalf of approximately 35 individuals, a number of whom in fact received the public housing benefit they requested based on fraudulent documentation.

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LEWIS, 31, of Brooklyn, New York, pled guilty to two counts of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, each of which carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison. Under the terms of her plea agreement, LEWIS has agreed to forfeit \$289,536 and to pay restitution of \$360,916.

The maximum potential sentences in this case are prescribed by Congress and are provided here for informational purposes only, as any sentencing of the defendant will be determined by the judge. LEWIS is scheduled to be sentenced by Judge Kaplan on May 18, 2023, at 3:00 p.m.

One of LEWIS's co-defendants, Tatiana Daniel, previously pled guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud and is scheduled to be sentenced by Judge Kaplan on March 29, 2023, at 2:30 p.m. LEWIS's two other co-defendants are currently scheduled to proceed to trial before Judge Kaplan on January 17, 2023.

Mr. Williams praised the outstanding efforts of agents, investigators, and analysts from the New York City Department of Investigation ("DOI"), DOI – NYCHA Office of the Inspector General, the New York Regional Office of the U.S. Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General ("DOL-OIG"), and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York. Mr. Williams also thanked the New York/New Jersey High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Intelligence Analysts for their support and assistance in this investigation. He also expressed gratitude to the New York City Police Department, the New York State Department of Labor, and the DOL-OIG Atlanta Regional Office for their assistance.

This matter is being handled by the Office's Complex Frauds and Cybercrime Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael D. Neff is in charge of the prosecution.

**Topic(s):**

Coronavirus

Financial Fraud

**Component(s):**

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**Contact:**

Nicholas Biase (212) 637-2600

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