

PRESS RELEASE

Middle District Of Florida Task Force Continues To Combat COVID-19 Fraud

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Middle District of Florida

Tampa, FL – United States Attorney Roger B. Handberg announces the results achieved by the Middle District of Florida’s efforts to combat fraud related to COVID-19. Those efforts have included complementary actions by the United States Attorney’s Office’s (USAO-MDFL) Criminal, Asset Recovery, and Civil Divisions, along with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies.

“The Middle District of Florida United States Attorney’s Office remains committed to protecting the integrity of government programs established to provide relief for those impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic,” said U.S. Attorney Roger Handberg. “These cases should serve as a warning to those who might have engaged in similar fraudulent activity that holding those accountable for these crimes remains a high priority for federal authorities.”

The USAO-MDFL’s Civil Division, in conjunction with the Fraud Section of the Department of Justice Civil Division’s Commercial Litigation Branch, recently announced a [\\$325,000 settlement](#) with Florida companies Kingwood Orlando Reunion Resort LLC and Kingwood Crystal River Resort Corp. (“Crystal River”) regarding allegations that they violated the False Claims Act and the Financial Institutions Reform, Recovery and Enforcement Act by knowingly providing false information in support of a Paycheck Protection Program (“PPP”) loan forgiveness application submitted by Crystal River.

On the criminal enforcement front, the USAO-MDFL and federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies combined resources in March 2020 to form the Middle District of Florida COVID-19 Fraud Task Force to identify, investigate, and prosecute fraud related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Since its inception, the Task Force has prosecuted 57 defendants for fraud schemes designed to exploit federal programs including the PPP, Economic Injury Disaster Loans (“EIDL”), Unemployment Insurance (“UI”), the Main Street Lending Program (“MSLP”), and the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (“ERAP”). Collectively, these defendants sought to defraud the United States of over \$91

million. 43 of those defendants have already been found guilty, while prosecution remains pending against 14 defendants.

(See chart for criminal case details.)

For example, in February 2023, [Keith Ingersoll](#) (46, Orlando) was sentenced to nine years and one month in federal prison for a variety of fraud schemes, including a real estate scam and a fraudulent EIDL application.

Also in February 2023, [Daniel Joseph Tisone](#) (35, Naples) was sentenced to seven years and three months in federal prison for a variety of COVID-19 fraud offenses. As part of his sentence, he was ordered to forfeit properties, an engagement ring, ammunition, and cash seized from bank accounts and must pay more than \$2.6 million in restitution. Tisone, a convicted felon, submitted false and fraudulent EIDL, MSLP, and PPP loan applications containing false representations, including about his criminal history, average monthly payroll, number of employees, and gross revenues.

Further, the USAO-MDFL's Asset Recovery Division and federal seizing agencies have completed the forfeiture of more than \$16.8 million of EIDL, UI, and PPP funds that were fraudulently obtained, depriving the fraudsters of their ill-gotten gains and recovering the proceeds for the victims. More than \$9.8 million in additional pandemic fraud proceeds have been seized and are pending civil or criminal forfeiture.

The U.S. Attorney General has established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with agencies across government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. For more information on the department's response to the pandemic, please visit <https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus>.

Through the PPP, the federal government authorized over \$600 billion in forgivable loans to small businesses for job retention and certain other expenses through the PPP. The EIDL program provides economic relief to small businesses that are currently experiencing a temporary loss of revenue. The MSLP provided support to small and medium-sized businesses and their employees across the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic. UI programs provided unemployment benefits to eligible workers who became unemployed through no fault of their own.

The criminal cases charged by the Middle District of Florida COVID-19 Fraud Task Force have been investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Secret Service, Internal Revenue Service—Criminal Investigation, the Department of Labor—Office of Inspector General, the U.S. Postal Service, the Federal Housing Finance Agency, the

Small Business Administration, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation—Office of Inspector General, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Special Inspector General for Pandemic Recovery, Federal Reserve Board – Office of Inspector General, the Metropolitan Bureau of Investigation, the Tampa Police Department, the Orlando Police Department, the Manatee County Sheriff’s Office, the Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Office, the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office, the Winter Park Police Department, the Osceola County Sheriff’s Office, the Seminole County Sheriff’s Office, and the Orange County Sheriff’s Office. The cases are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys throughout the Middle District of Florida.

The Department of Justice needs the public’s assistance in remaining vigilant and reporting suspected fraudulent activity. To report suspected fraud, contact the National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) at (866) 720-5721 or file an online complaint at: [https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/webform/ncdf-disaster-complaint-....](https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/webform/ncdf-disaster-complaint-...) Complaints filed will be reviewed at the NCDF and referred to federal, state, local, or international law enforcement or regulatory agencies for investigation.

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