

**PRESS RELEASE**

# **Former Cashier at Veterans Affairs Medical Center Sentenced to Prison for Stealing from Patients and Engaging in Pandemic Assistance Fraud**

Monday, March 18, 2024

**For Immediate Release**

U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of Pennsylvania

PITTSBURGH, Pa. - A resident of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, has been sentenced in federal court to six months of imprisonment, to be followed by two years of supervised release, in connection with his conviction for embezzling money from disabled veterans' accounts and conducting a mail fraud scheme to obtain pandemic unemployment assistance, United States Attorney Eric G. Olshan announced today.

United States Senior District Judge Nora Bary Fischer imposed the sentence on Corey Mizell, 51.

According to information presented to the Court, Mizell previously worked as an agent cashier at the H. John Heinz III Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center. In January 2021, the sister of a deceased veteran called the VA Police after reviewing the balance in her brother's patient account. According to the sister, her brother was essentially bedridden due to his disability and the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus could not spend the amount of cash withdrawn from his account. The VA Police opened an investigation into the account activity and questioned Mizell, the teller who conducted each withdrawal.

Mizell initially informed the VA Police that someone must have misrepresented their identity to him in order to fraudulently obtain the funds. Mizell also opined that he was an easy target for such a scheme since he recently had become an agent cashier. The investigation revealed that Mizell would call for authorization to withdraw funds from

patients who were either on COVID lockdown or who could not leave their room without an escort due to their disabilities. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General (VA-OIG) confronted Mizell after driving by his residence to find the backyard and exterior of his home being remodeled.

Following his interview with the VA-OIG, Mizell provided a written confession in which he admitted to “fraudulently taking money...from accounts of veterans.” Mizell, also a wedding DJ, attributed his conduct to losing income during the pandemic and unpaid bills. Mizell identified three veterans from whom he took money, estimating the total amount stolen as \$17,660, and resigned from the VA in April 2021.

Mizell omitted from his written confession that he also embezzled funds from a fourth veteran and that he also fraudulently applied for and obtained pandemic unemployment assistance. A separate investigation conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General revealed that Mizell filed an electronic application for pandemic benefits in April 2020. Despite working for the VA since 2016, Mizell falsely stated that he was not a federal employee. Beginning in May 2020, Mizell falsified that he was not working full time, when he was in fact working full time as an agent cashier. After his resignation from the VA, Mizell certified on a weekly basis that he was unemployed due to the pandemic. These falsifications allowed Mizell to collect pandemic benefits totaling \$38,400.

In imposing Mizell’s sentence, Judge Fischer denied the defendant’s request for a non-incarceration sentence, finding it striking that Mizell, himself a veteran, embezzled money from other veterans. The judge further stated that Mizell did not just steal money from the government, but also stole money from veterans and their families, with some of Mizell’s victims so disabled that they could not even walk to his cashier window. Judge Fischer also ordered Mizell to serve the first six months of his supervised release (following his imprisonment) at home on an electronic location monitor, and to pay over \$57,000 in restitution to the four veterans and the government.

Assistant United States Attorney Brendan J. McKenna prosecuted this case on behalf of the government.

United States Attorney Olshan commended the Department of Labor Office of Inspector General and Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General for the extensive and collaborative investigation leading to the successful prosecution of Mizell.

*Updated March 18, 2024*

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**Topic**

**FINANCIAL FRAUD**

**Component**

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