

PRESS RELEASE

15 charged in scheme to defraud government aid programs

Thursday, March 27, 2025

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of Texas

HOUSTON – Fourteen Texas residents and one Louisiana woman have been indicted for participating in schemes using falsified documents to obtain Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans and unemployment insurance benefits, announced U.S. Attorney Nicholas J. Ganjei.

The final five taken into custody are expected to make their initial appearances before U.S. Magistrate Dena Hanovice Palermo at 2 p.m. Those include Brittany Garner-Richard, 38, Humble; Miguel Bell, 39, Port Arthur; Candace Booker and Andrea King, both 33 and of Beaumont; and Joshe Johnson, 34, Corrigan.

A federal grand jury returned the 18-count indictment March 4.

The charges allege Ebone Myrriah Mott, 37, Houston, conspired with others to falsify applications and claims to help them qualify for PPP loans and unemployment insurance benefits for which they were not otherwise eligible.

Mott allegedly created fictitious companies, prepared falsified records and submitted the applications on behalf of co-conspirators. The charges allege they paid her for her assistance - approximately \$200 up front and 10% of the payouts.

The Small Business Administration relied on the fraudulent loan applications, insurance claims and falsified supporting records in the application process and the subsequent disbursement of loan proceeds or benefits, according to the charges.

Mott is charged with one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and 17 counts of wire fraud.

In addition to Garner-Richard, Bell, Booker, King and Johnson, all others are also charged in the conspiracy and one or two counts of wire fraud. They were also taken

into custody between March 23-26 and include Tiara Petties, 31, and Jennifer Petties, 32, both of Livingston; Kierra Patrice Chancey, 29, and Dekovan Williams, 28, both of Nacogdoches; Roy Shemeaker, 38, Dallas; Trakeesha Nishell Brown, 40, Lufkin; Veronica Moses, 40, Diboll, Travecia Hampton-Isabell, 37, Whitehouse, and Frankie Desiree Bogany 33, Vivian, Louisiana.

PPP loans are a source of financial relief The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act provides. The CARES Act is a federal law enacted in March 2020 designed to provide emergency financial assistance to Americans who were suffering economic effects the COVID-19 pandemic caused. Unemployment insurance provides benefits to persons who are out of work due to no fault of their own and who meet other eligibility requirements of state laws.

If convicted, each face up to 20 years in federal prison and a possible \$250,000 maximum fine.

The Department of State - Diplomatic Security Service, Department of Labor - Office of Inspector General and California Employment Development Department conducted the investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Day is prosecuting the case.

An indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence. A defendant is presumed innocent unless convicted through due process of law.

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