

**Department of Justice**

U.S. Attorney's Office

Western District of New York

---

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, November 2, 2022

## **Former Buffalo Man Pleads Guilty To COVID Fraud**

CONTACT: Barbara Burns

PHONE: (716) 843-5817

FAX #: (716) 551-3051

BUFFALO, N.Y. – U.S. Attorney Trini E. Ross announced today that Mohammad Fares, 28, formerly of Buffalo, now of Florida, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Lawrence J. Vilardo to theft of government property, which carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a \$,250,000 fine.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Charles M. Kruly, who is handling the case, stated that on May 18, 2020, Fares submitted an online application to the New York State Department of Labor for unemployment insurance benefits, stating that he did not work any day during the week of May 18, 2020; that he did not have gross earnings over \$504; that his last day of work was March 21, 2020; and that his workplace had closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time, Fares co-owned a trucking company in Buffalo, for which he managed truck drivers and coordinated shipments. On June 11, 2020, Fares received \$3,600 in Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation benefits. Every week through May 2, 2021, Fares certified to that he did not work during the prior week and had not returned to work. In doing so, Fares certified his continued eligibility for Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation and NYS Department of Labor unemployment benefits. During this time period, Fares continued to manage the trucking company. Fares received, in total, approximately \$43,320 in unemployment benefits and Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation.

The CARES Act is a federal law enacted on March 29, 2020, designed to provide emergency financial assistance to the millions of Americans who are suffering the economic effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It expands states' ability to provide unemployment insurance for many workers impacted by COVID-19, including for workers who are not ordinarily eligible for benefits. The CARES Act provided for three new UI programs: Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA); Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC); and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC).

Anyone with information about allegations of attempted fraud involving COVID-19 can report it by calling the Department of Justice's National Center for Disaster Fraud Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

The plea is the result of an investigation by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations – Labor Racketeering and Fraud, New York Region, under the direction of Special Agent-in-Charge Jonathan Mellone and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, under the direction of Acting Special Agent-in-Charge Michael Stansbury.

Sentencing is scheduled for March 7, 2022, before Judge Vilardo.

# # # #

**Topic(s):**  
Coronavirus

**Component(s):**  
USAO - New York, Western

Updated November 2, 2022