

**PRESS RELEASE**

# **Lead Defendant in Multi-State SNAP and PUA Fraud Conspiracy Pleads Guilty**

Wednesday, March 25, 2026

**For Immediate Release**

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Massachusetts

**Defendant used more than 100 stolen identities to steal \$440,000 in SNAP benefits from Massachusetts and Rhode Island and \$700,000 in PUA benefits from multiple states**

BOSTON – A Fitchburg, Mass. man pleaded guilty today in federal court in Worcester to his role in a fraud scheme that used the stolen identities of more than 100 individuals to obtain \$440,000 in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits from Massachusetts and Rhode Island. The defendant and his alleged co-conspirators also fraudulently obtained over \$700,000 in Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) benefits from Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio Washington and Nevada.

Raul Fernandez Vicioso, 37, pleaded guilty to Conspiracy to Commit SNAP Fraud, Conspiracy to Commit Wire Fraud, SNAP benefit Fraud, Aiding and Abetting and Money Laundering. U.S. District Court Judge Margaret R. Guzman scheduled sentencing for July 9, 2026.

The defendant was charged [on Feb. 3, 2026](#). Three alleged co-conspirators – Joel Vicioso Fernandez, 42, of Fitchburg, Mass.; Roman Vequiz Fernandez, 32, a Venezuelan national living in Leominster, Mass.; and Coralba Albarracin Siniva, 24, a Venezuelan national living in Leominster, Mass., were charged [by criminal complaint](#).

Raul Fernandez Vicioso and his alleged co-conspirators purchased and used the stolen personal information of over 100 real people from multiple states to fraudulently obtain SNAP benefits. The stolen identities were used to create 24 “households” in SNAP applications. All of these applications, submitted in the names of over 100 people, were listed as living in two single-family apartments in Providence, R.I.

A number of the stolen identities from Connecticut, Florida, Kentucky, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Puerto Rico were used to fraudulently obtain SNAP benefits in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

Raul Fernandez Vicioso used his own personal information to create fraudulent SNAP benefit accounts that were found commingled among the victim identities in the applications. In support of the fraudulently submitted SNAP applications, the defendants and their co-conspirators allegedly provided images of counterfeit passports and passport cards, with metadata that indicated the images were taken inside or within the immediate vicinity of El Primo Restaurant – a restaurant operated by Raul Fernandez Vicioso in Leominster, Mass.

The defendants and their co-conspirators allegedly used the fraudulent SNAP benefits cards to purchase large quantities of expensive bulk food items (such as multiple-pound packages of chicken, beef and pork) at various local wholesalers and food markets to stock El Primo Restaurant at no expense. With their supplies obtained for free through fraudulent SNAP benefits, they sold menu items at El Primo Restaurant at a complete profit, later wiring the fraud proceeds to individuals living in Venezuela and the Dominican Republic, among other places.

According to the charging documents, between April 2020 and December 2021, the defendants and their co-conspirators further enriched themselves by over \$700,000 by submitting fraudulent applications and supporting documents for PUA in Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Nevada. The fraudulent PUA benefits were issued in the names of Raul Fernandez Vicioso and allegedly Joel Vicioso Fernandez and in the names of suspected identity theft victims, including identities common to the related the SNAP benefit fraud. At least 29 different identities were allegedly used in PUA applications in six different states – all of which listed the address for El Primo Restaurant as the residential address. Bank records obtained during the investigation detail approximately \$276,021 in fraudulent PUA benefits deposited into bank accounts held in the names of the El Primo Restaurant, Raul Fernandez Vicioso and allegedly Joel Vicioso Fernandez and other co-conspirators. Other fraudulent PUA benefits were allegedly issued to prepaid cards in the identities of the various individuals which were applied for using known addresses and telephone numbers of the subjects.

During searches of Raul Fernandez Vicioso's residence and the El Primo Restaurant, fraudulently obtained Massachusetts and Rhode Island EBT cards, fraudulent documents bearing a Providence address involved in the alleged scheme, printed ledgers and handwritten lists of more than 100 identities and SNAP-related mailings were recovered.

Fraud, waste or abuse can be reported to the Council of the Inspectors General for Integrity and Efficiency: <https://www.oversight.gov/where-report-fraud-waste-abuse-or-retaliation>.

The charge of Conspiracy to Commit SNAP Fraud provides for a sentence of up to five years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. The charge of Conspiracy to Commit Wire Fraud provides for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. The charge of illegal acquisition or use of SNAP benefits provides for a sentence of up to five years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. The charge of money laundering provides for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$500,000 or twice the amount involved in the transaction, whichever is greater. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and statutes which govern the determination of a sentence in a criminal case.

United States Attorney Leah B. Foley; Charmeka Parker, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Department of Agriculture - Office of Inspector General, Northeast Region; Anthony P. D'Esposito, Inspector General, Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General; Thomas Demeo, Special Agent in Charge of the Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigation, Boston Field Office; and Michael J. Krol, Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations in New England made the announcement today. Valuable assistance was provided by the Social Security Administration - Office of Inspector General; U.S. Department of Homeland Security - Office of Inspector General; U.S. Postal Inspection Service; U.S. Department of State - Diplomatic Security Service; Rhode Island Office of Internal Audit - Fraud Detection & Prevention Unit; Massachusetts State Police; the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Rhode Island; and the Fitchburg and Leominster Police Departments. Assistant U.S. Attorney Danial Bennett of the Worcester Branch Office is prosecuting the case.

The details contained in the charging document are allegations. The remaining defendants are presumed to be innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in the court of law.

*Updated March 25, 2026*