

PRESS RELEASE

Middlesex County Woman Sentenced to 20 Months for Defrauding Multiple COVID-19 Relief Programs

Friday, April 17, 2026

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of New Jersey

TRENTON, N.J. – A Middlesex County, New Jersey, woman was sentenced to 20 months in prison for fraudulently obtaining Economic Injury Disaster Loan (“EIDL”), Paycheck Protection Program (“PPP”), and pandemic unemployment insurance benefits, U.S. Attorney Robert Frazer announced.

Damaris Valerio, a/k/a Damaris Tineo Abreu, 42, of Perth Amboy, New Jersey, previously pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Robert Kirsch to an information charging her with one count of wire fraud and one count of money laundering. Judge Kirsch, on April 14, imposed the sentence in Trenton federal court.

According to documents filed in this case and statements made in court:

From April 2020 through December 2021, Valerio fraudulently obtained \$194,212 in COVID-19 emergency relief funds, which included loans and cash advances meant for distressed small businesses under the EIDL program and PPP, and pandemic unemployment insurance benefits meant for unemployed workers, by submitting false and fraudulent applications inflating her business’s revenues, payroll expenses, and number of employees. After receiving the fraudulent funds, she diverted proceeds from the relief programs for her personal gain.

In addition to the prison term, Judge Kirsch sentenced Valerio to 3 years of supervised release and ordered to pay \$194,212 in restitution.

U.S. Attorney Frazer credited special agents of U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Michael McCarthy in Newark; Special Agents of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Inspector General Anthony P. D’Esposito, and

special agents of the Social Security Administration, Office of the Inspector General's Boston-New York Field Division, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Amy Connelly, with the investigation.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Benjamin D. Bleiberg and Fatime Meka Cano of the Economic Crimes Unit in Newark.

The District of New Jersey COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Strike Force is one of five strike forces established throughout the United States by the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate and prosecute COVID-19 fraud. The strike forces focus on large-scale, multi-state pandemic relief fraud perpetrated by criminal organizations and transnational actors. The strike forces are interagency law enforcement efforts, using prosecutor-led and data analyst-driven teams designed to identify and bring to justice those who stole pandemic relief funds.

The Department of Justice has established the National Fraud Enforcement Division. The core mission of the National Fraud Enforcement Division is to zealously investigate and prosecute those who steal or fraudulently misuse taxpayer dollars. The National Fraud Enforcement Division will fulfill that mission by coordinating with agencies responsible for administering benefit programs; partnering with federal, tribal, state, territorial, and local law enforcement on fraud-fighting efforts; developing systems and processes that ensure efficient identification of fraud against taxpayer dollars; and equipping prosecutors and law enforcement with state-of-the-art tools and resources needed to bring criminal actors to justice. The attorneys in the National Fraud Enforcement Division will work every day to protect the financial integrity of our government and the tax system that supports it.

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>.

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Defense Counsel: John Russo, Esq, of New York.

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