

PRESS RELEASE

Brockton Man Sentenced for Pandemic Unemployment Fraud

Thursday, July 20, 2023

For Immediate Release

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

BOSTON – A Brockton man has been sentenced in federal court in Boston for using others' identities to fraudulently obtain over \$60,000 in Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) Benefits and for using one of those identities to fraudulently obtain a Massachusetts driver's license.

Francisco Jose Peguero Brea, 48, was sentenced on July 14, 2023 by U.S. District Court Judge Rya Zobel to three months in prison and three years of supervised release. In February 2023, Peguero pleaded guilty to one count of wire fraud and one count of false representation of a Social Security number.

Peguero used the name and Social Security number of a U.S. citizen to fraudulently apply for and obtain PUA benefits as well as a Massachusetts Driver's License. Peguero received additional PUA benefits from another claim that directed the funds to be deposited into a bank account controlled by Peguero and another individual.

Acting United States Attorney Joshua S. Levy and Michael J. Krol, Acting Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations in New England made the announcement. Valuable assistance was provided by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General; U.S. Department of State, Diplomatic Security Service; U.S. Postal Inspection Service; Massachusetts State Police; and the Brockton Police Department. Assistant U.S. Attorney Benjamin A. Saltzman of the Criminal Division prosecuted the case.

The investigation was conducted by Homeland Security's Investigation's Document and Benefit Fraud Task Force (DBFTF), a specialized field investigative group comprised of personnel from various local, state, and federal agencies with expertise in detecting, deterring, and disrupting organizations and individuals involved in various types of document, identity, and benefit fraud schemes.

On May 17, 2021, the Attorney General established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with

agencies across government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. The Task Force bolsters efforts to investigate and prosecute the most culpable domestic and international criminal actors and assists agencies tasked with administering relief programs to prevent fraud by, among other methods, augmenting and incorporating existing coordination mechanisms, identifying resources and techniques to uncover fraudulent actors and their schemes, and sharing and harnessing information and insights gained from prior enforcement efforts. For more information on the Department's response to the pandemic, please visit <https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus>.

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 (NCDF) 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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