

PRESS RELEASE

# Brooklyn Woman Sentenced To Three Years In Prison For COVID-19 Fraud Scheme And Fraud On NYCHA

Thursday, February 8, 2024

## For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of New York

Damian Williams, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that CHANETTE LEWIS was sentenced today to three years in prison for her role in two fraud schemes. LEWIS participated in a scheme to commit COVID-19 pandemic fraud by (i) defrauding New York City's COVID-19 Hotel Room Isolation Program, and (ii) committing unemployment benefits fraud. LEWIS also committed a fraud in which she submitted fabricated documents to the New York City Housing Authority ("NYCHA") — such as purported Orders of Protection bearing Judges' names, purported letters from a District Attorney, and purported letters from healthcare professionals attesting to alleged medical issues — in order to secure public housing benefits for her customers. LEWIS's sentence was imposed by U.S. District Judge Lewis A. Kaplan.

*U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said: "Chanette Lewis exploited multiple lifelines offered to New York City residents in need during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of her schemes misappropriated identifying information of hardworking individuals, including medical professionals whose services were vital during the pandemic. For her brazen crimes, Lewis has now been sentenced to prison."*

According to the allegations contained in the Superseding Information, court filings, and statements made during court proceedings:

[LEWIS's COVID-19 Pandemic Fraud Scheme](#)

During 2020 and 2021, LEWIS conspired to commit COVID-19 pandemic fraud in two ways.

First, LEWIS defrauded the COVID-19 Hotel Room Isolation Program (the "Program"). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, New York City created the Program. Funded by New York City and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Program provided free hotel rooms for qualifying individuals throughout New York City. In total, the Program was open to (i) healthcare workers who needed to isolate because of exposure to COVID-19; (ii) patients who had tested positive for COVID-19; (iii) individuals who believed, based on their symptoms, that they were infected with COVID-19; and (iv) individuals who lived with someone who contracted COVID-19. As stated on the City's website describing the Program, such individuals "may qualify to self-isolate in a hotel, free of charge, for up to 14 days if you do not have a safe place to self-isolate." Those who wished to book a hotel room through the Program could either call a phone number or use an online hotel booking platform.

LEWIS defrauded the Program in several respects. First, she secured free Program hotel rooms for herself by falsely claiming to be a healthcare worker. Second, she sold at least approximately 1,936 nights' worth of fraudulently obtained hotel rooms to customers who were ineligible for the Program. Third, LEWIS abused her employment, which was supposed to be in service of the Program. Specifically, LEWIS worked at a call center that handled phone calls and certain reservations for the Program for several months in 2020. As a result of her employment, LEWIS had access to legitimate healthcare workers' identifying information. LEWIS abused her position, including by misappropriating healthcare workers' identifying information, revealing the Program's inner workings to co-conspirators, and making unauthorized sales of Program hotel rooms to ineligible individuals. For instance, LEWIS sold a co-defendant personal identifying information of at least five healthcare professionals, as well as certain "codes" to use when booking hotel reservations through the Program, such as an employee ID number and license number. LEWIS also advertised to potential customers that when hotels asked for a healthcare worker's identification, LEWIS would supply a purported paystub and a letter falsely asserting that the individual was a healthcare worker.

Second, during 2020 and 2021, LEWIS committed unemployment benefits fraud in New York State by fraudulently obtaining such benefits for herself and also by stealing the identity of an incarcerated individual and conspiring to obtain unemployment benefits issued for the benefit of that individual. In total, LEWIS fraudulently obtained approximately \$47,000 in unemployment benefits.

#### LEWIS's Fraud on NYCHA

During 2020 and 2021, LEWIS participated in a separate conspiracy to defraud NYCHA. LEWIS submitted fabricated documents to NYCHA — such as purported Orders of Protection bearing Judges’ names, purported letters from a District Attorney, and purported letters from doctors attesting to alleged medical issues — in order to secure public housing benefits for her customers, including transfers to larger NYCHA apartments. In total, LEWIS submitted fraudulent applications to NYCHA on behalf of more than approximately 30 individuals, a number of whom in fact received the public housing benefit they requested based on fraudulent documentation submitted by LEWIS.

\* \* \*

In addition to her prison term, LEWIS, 32, of Brooklyn, New York, was sentenced to three years of supervised release and ordered to forfeit \$289,536 and to pay restitution of \$360,330.

LEWIS’s three co-defendants — Tatiana Benjamin, Tatiana Daniel, and Heaven West — previously pled guilty. On February 1, 2024, Benjamin was sentenced principally to one year and one day in prison, three years of supervised release, restitution of \$294,624, and forfeiture of \$51,088; and West was sentenced principally to time served, three years of supervised release, restitution of \$59,644, and forfeiture of \$23,684. Daniel’s sentencing is scheduled for March 6, 2024, at 11:30 a.m.

Mr. Williams praised the outstanding efforts of agents, investigators, and analysts from the New York City Department of Investigation, the New York Regional Office of the U.S. Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General (“DOL-OIG”), and the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of New York. Mr. Williams also thanked the New York/New Jersey High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Intelligence Analysts for their support and assistance in this investigation. He also expressed gratitude to the New York City Police Department, the New York State Department of Labor, and the DOL-OIG Atlanta Regional Office for their assistance.

This matter is being handled by the Office’s Complex Frauds and Cybercrime Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael D. Neff is in charge of the prosecution.

### **Contact**

Nicholas Biase, Lauren Scarff  
(212) 637-2600

*Updated February 8, 2024*

---

### **Topics**

**CORONAVIRUS**

**FINANCIAL FRAUD**

**Component**

[USAO - New York, Southern](#)

Press Release Number: 24-046