



Department of Justice

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Western District of North Carolina**

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CAREER COACH PLEADS GUILTY TO STEALING MORE THAN \$68,000 FROM FEDERALLY FUNDED WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – Jessica Anne Miller, 38, of Hickory, N.C., pleaded guilty to federal charges today for stealing more than \$68,000 from a federally funded workforce development program, announced William T. Stetzer, Acting U.S. Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina. U.S. Magistrate Judge David C. Keesler presided over the plea hearing.

Acting U.S. Attorney Stetzer is joined in making this announcement by Rafiq Ahmad, Special Agent-in-Charge, Atlanta Region, U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG).

According to filed plea documents and today's court hearing, from July 2016 to November 2019, Miller was employed as a career coach by an entity contracted by a nonprofit association of local governments to provide training to job seekers, using federal funds made available by the U.S. Department of Labor under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). WIOA was signed into law in 2014, and it is designed to provide qualified individuals with access to training, education, and support services, and assistance with obtaining employment. As part of WIOA, qualified individuals can also be reimbursed for certain eligible expenditures such as mileage, costs and fees, and tools of the trade, among others.

According to court records, as career coach, Miller was responsible for providing career guidance, case management and follow up to participants in the youth program. As Miller admitted in court today, while serving as a career coach, she engaged in a scheme to divert more than \$68,000 of government funds for her own benefit, by creating bogus documents, falsifying signatures, and making false and misleading statements to qualified individuals who were supposed to be the recipients of the WIOA funds.

According to court records, to perpetuate the scheme, in some instances Miller created fraudulent documents for mileage reimbursement on behalf of students enrolled in the program, and then cashed the checks and kept the proceeds for herself. When victims inquired about the status of their mileage reimbursement claims, Miller gave numerous bogus excuses, including that the program no longer had reimbursement funds available. In other instances, court records show that Miller created fraudulent documents that falsely indicated student-victims had

received vaccines and were seeking reimbursements for the costs associated with those vaccines, when in truth and fact the student-victims had not received the vaccines, had no knowledge of the reimbursement forms submitted on their behalf, and did not receive the checks issued in their names. Instead, Miller kept the reimbursement checks, forging the signatures of the student-victims so that she could cash the checks and keep the proceeds for herself.

In other instances, Miller created fraudulent documents that falsely indicated that qualified individuals had made reimbursable purchases, such as tools of the trade, and were seeking reimbursement for those costs. Miller then submitted the fraudulent documents and cashed the reimbursement checks. Miller also created and submitted fraudulent documents, forging student-victims' signatures, indicating that student-victims had successfully completed certain milestones that would have entitled them to gift cards. Instead of providing those gift cards to the student-victims, Miller kept them for herself.

As Miller admitted in court today, Miller also fraudulently opened bank accounts in the names of at least two student-victims and used those accounts to cash the fraudulent reimbursement checks. Additionally, Miller opened American Express accounts in the names of three student-victims, which she subsequently used to deposit some of the fraudulently obtained reimbursement checks. In total, Miller defrauded at least 40 individuals and diverted more than \$68,000 in government funds for her own personal enrichment.

Miller pleaded guilty to wire fraud scheme, which carries a maximum prison term of 20 years and a \$250,000 fine. Following today's plea hearing, Miller was released on bond. A sentencing date for Miller has not been set.

In making today's announcement, Acting U.S. Attorney Stetzer commended DOL-OIG for their investigation of the case and thanked the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation and the Conover Police Department for their invaluable assistance.

Assistant United States Attorney Maria Vento, of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Charlotte, is in charge of the prosecution.

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