

PRESS RELEASE

Delaware Woman Admits Role in COVID-19 Relief Program Fraud Scheme

Wednesday, April 16, 2025

For Immediate Release

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

CAMDEN, N.J. – A Delaware woman admitted to conspiring to obtain more than \$1 million of federal Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans and Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL), U.S. Attorney Alina Habba announced.

Adrienne Ponzo, 50, of Bear, Delaware, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Karen M. Williams to one count of wire fraud conspiracy.

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

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act is a federal law enacted in March 2020 and was designed to provide emergency financial assistance to the millions of Americans who are suffering the economic effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. One source of relief provided by the CARES Act was the authorization of hundreds of billions of dollars in forgivable loans to small businesses for job retention and certain other expenses, through a program referred to as the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). The CARES Act also authorized the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to provide Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDLs) of up to \$2 million to eligible small businesses that were experiencing substantial financial disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

To obtain a PPP or EIDL loan, a qualifying small business was required to submit an application and provide information on its operations, including the number of employees and revenues or expenses. In addition, businesses generally had to provide supporting documentation such as tax returns and bank statements.

Adrienne Ponzo conspired with others to defraud the SBA and the PPP program. Ponzo's co-conspirators recruited individuals who owned companies with little or no operations and introduced them to Ponzo. Ponzo prepared fraudulent PPP

and EIDL applications for these businesses and caused them to be electronically submitted to the SBA and PPP lenders. Ponzo prepared fraudulent bank statements and tax returns for companies that did not have them. Ponzo received a portion of the loan proceeds for her role in the scheme. 14 loans totaling nearly \$1,500,000 were part of the scheme.

The count of wire fraud conspiracy is punishable by a maximum of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine, or twice the gross gain or loss from the offense.

Sentencing is scheduled for August 26, 2025.

U.S. Attorney Habba credited special agents of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation – Office of the Inspector General, under the direction of Patricia Tarasca, Special Agent-in-Charge, New York Regional Office; special agents of the FBI’s South Jersey Resident Agency, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Wayne Jacobs in Philadelphia; special agents of the Social Security Administration, Office of the Inspector General, Boston New York Field Division, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Amy Connelly; and special agents of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, Northeast Region, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Jonathan Mellone, with the investigation leading to this guilty plea.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Daniel A. Friedman and Attorney-in-Charge Jason M. Richardson of the U.S. Attorney’s Office’s Criminal Division in Camden.

The charges and allegations contained in the indictment are merely accusations, and the defendant is considered innocent unless proven guilty.

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Defense counsel:

Troy A. Archie, Esq., Cinnaminson, New Jersey

[ponzo.indictment.pdf](#)

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