

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of Massachusetts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, May 20, 2020

Dominican National Sentenced for Identity Theft and Stealing MassHealth Benefits

BOSTON – A Dominican national formerly residing in Lawrence was sentenced today for Social Security and benefit fraud.

Cesar Franco Lara, 37, was sentenced during a videoconference before U.S. District Court Judge Leo T. Sorokin to 20 months in prison and ordered to pay \$3,468 in restitution to MassHealth. Franco Lara will also face deportation proceedings upon completion of his sentence. In January 2020, Franco Lara pleaded guilty to one count of false representation of Social Security number and one count of theft of government money. Pursuant to a plea agreement that was accepted by the Court today, the government dismissed one count of aggravated identity theft after the defendant was sentenced.

On Aug. 5, 2016, Franco Lara applied for a Massachusetts identification card using the name, date of birth and Social Security number of a United States citizen born in Puerto Rico. On Aug. 18, 2016, he used that Massachusetts identification card to apply for and receive nearly \$3,500 of MassHealth benefits in the U.S. citizen's name. In an effort to determine the true identity of the defendant, law enforcement found a non-immigrant visitor visa application bearing the defendant's photograph and fingerprints. This application was refused by the Department of State in 2015.

When arrested on federal charges, Franco Lara had on him a MassHealth ID card in the U.S. citizen's name. His fingerprints were found to be a match of the fingerprints on file from the refused visa application.

United States Attorney Andrew E. Lelling; Michael Shea, Acting Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations in Boston; Phillip Coyne, Special Agent in Charge of the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations, Boston Field Division; William B. Gannon, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Department of State, Diplomatic Security Service, Boston Field Office; Joseph W. Cronin, Inspector in Charge of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service; Colonel Christopher Mason, Superintendent of the Massachusetts State Police; and John Gibbons, U.S. Marshal for the District of Massachusetts made the announcement today. HSI's Document and Benefit Fraud Task Force, a specialized investigative group comprised of various local, state and federal agencies, conducted this investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Lindsey E. Weinstein and David G. Tobin of Lelling's Criminal Division prosecuted the case.