

PRESS RELEASE

Hartford Man Charged with Fraudulently Collecting Social Security, Unemployment, and Food Stamp Benefits

Tuesday, May 7, 2024

For Immediate Release

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

Vanessa Roberts Avery, United States Attorney for the District of Connecticut, today announced that a federal grand jury in Hartford has returned an indictment charging RICARDO SANTIAGO, 58, of Hartford, with three counts of wire fraud related to a scheme to fraudulently obtain Social Security, unemployment, and Food Stamp benefits.

The indictment was returned on May 1, 2024, and Santiago was arrested today. He appeared before U.S. Magistrate Judge Thomas O. Farrish in Hartford, pleaded not guilty to the charges, and was released on a \$25,000 bond.

As alleged in the indictment and statements made in court, between 2002 and 2024, Santiago held jobs with numerous employers and earned income totaling more than \$500,000. Santiago concealed his income from federal and state government agencies by providing to employers false identification, including a Social Security number and card belonging to another individual, and, in at least one instance, a false Social Security card.

The indictment alleges that, in 2002, Santiago applied for Retirement Survivors Disability Insurance (RSDI) benefits, representing to the Social Security Administration that he was unable to work due to disability. As a result, he began receiving RSDI payments in September 2002. In 2017, Santiago completed paperwork to maintain his benefits in which he asserted that he remained disabled and had not worked for the past two years. Santiago ultimately collected more than \$300,000 in RSDI payments to which he was not entitled.

The indictment also alleges that, in February 2017, Santiago submitted to the Connecticut Department of Social Services (CT-DSS) an application for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits (“Food Stamps”), representing to the CT-DSS and the U.S. Department of Agriculture that he earned no income from employment. He began receiving SNAP benefits in March 2017, and subsequently completed forms to renew his SNAP benefits on which he again represented that he had no change in his income and that he earned no money from employment. Santiago made more than \$17,000 in purchases with SNAP benefits to which he was not entitled.

The indictment further alleges that, in April 2020, Santiago applied to the Connecticut Department of Labor (CT-DOL) for Unemployment Insurance benefits. On the application, Santiago used a Social Security number belonging to another individual, and he represented to the CT-DOL and U.S. Department of Labor that he was unemployed but available for work and physically able to work. He subsequently completed weekly certifications making the same representations. From April 2020 through February 2021, Santiago received more than \$35,000 in payments to which he was not entitled.

If convicted, Santiago faces a maximum term of imprisonment of 20 years on each count of wire fraud.

U.S. Attorney Avery stressed that an indictment is not evidence of guilt. Charges are only allegations, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

This matter is being investigated by the Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Inspector General, and the U.S. Department of Labor Office of the Inspector General. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Nathan J. Guevremont.

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