

PRESS RELEASE

Middle District Of Florida Task Force Continues To Combat COVID-19 Fraud

Tuesday, October 17, 2023

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Middle District of Florida

Tampa, FL – United States Attorney Roger B. Handberg announces the results achieved by the Middle District of Florida's efforts to combat fraud related to COVID-19. Those efforts have included complementary actions by the United States Attorney's Office's (USAO-MDFL) Criminal, Asset Recovery, Appellate, and Civil Divisions, along with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies.

"The Middle District of Florida United States Attorney's Office continues to pursue, investigate, prosecute, and recover money from those who were engaged in major or sophisticated fraud schemes designed to steal benefits intended for Americans coping with the myriad impacts of the pandemic," said U.S. Attorney Roger Handberg.

On the criminal enforcement front, the USAO-MDFL and federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies combined resources in March 2020 to form the Middle District of Florida COVID-19 Fraud Task Force to identify, investigate, and prosecute fraud related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Since its inception, the Task Force has prosecuted 73 defendants for fraud schemes designed to exploit federal programs including the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL), Unemployment Insurance (UI), the Main Street Lending Program (MSLP), the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP), as well as government Healthcare programs such as Medicare (HCF). Collectively, these defendants sought to defraud the United States of over \$83 million. Fifty-three of those defendants have already been found guilty, while prosecution remains pending against 20 defendants. *(See chart for criminal case*

details.) In fiscal year 2023, the Task Force indicted 24 COVID-19 fraud related cases in which defendants sought to obtain more than \$14 million from the various federal programs.

For example, in September 2023, Jordan Ross was indicted on charges relating to EIDL and PPP applications he submitted. During the pandemic, Ross applied for 3 EIDLs and 5 PPP loans. Ross made numerous false statements in these applications including misrepresenting the number of employees, submitting fake tax documents, and submitting fake invoices. Ross's false and fraudulent representation caused the SBA and PPP lender to approve and fund 1 EIDL and 2 PPP loans totaling over \$800,000. Ross used these funds for his personal benefit, allegedly purchasing a vehicle with the fraudulent funds amongst other items.

In another matter, U.S. District Judge Mary S. Scriven sentenced Alexander Leszczynski (24, North Redington Beach) to 17 years and 6 months in federal prison for three different fraud schemes (one of which including a fraudulent PPP loan) in which he attempted to obtain more than \$10 million from the U.S. government, financial institutions, and individual victims.

In a case handled by the Civil Division, Victory Automotive Group, Inc. (VAG) agreed to pay \$9 million to resolve allegations that it violated the False Claims Act by providing false information in support of PPP loan forgiveness application. Only small businesses are eligible for PPP loans. Whether an applicant qualifies as a small business is determined by assessing the employees, revenues, or net worth of the applicant along with any other corporate affiliates that share common operational control. VAG's application for a PPP loan certified it was a small business with fewer than 500 employees. However, VAG shared common operational control with dozens of automobile dealerships across the country, and VAG and its affiliates had more than 3,000 employees. For that reason, VAG should have known that VAG was ineligible for the \$6,282,362 PPP loan it received, which was later forgiven in full.

Further, the USAO-MDFL's Asset Recovery Division and federal seizing agencies have completed the forfeiture of more than \$17.2 million of EIDL, UI, and PPP funds that were fraudulently obtained, depriving the fraudsters of their ill-gotten gains and recovering the proceeds for the victims. More than \$18 million in additional pandemic fraud proceeds have been seized and are pending civil or criminal forfeiture.

The Attorney General established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with agencies across government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. For more information on the department's response to the pandemic, please visit <https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus>.

Through the PPP, the federal government authorized over \$600 billion in forgivable loans to small businesses for job retention and certain other expenses through the PPP. The EIDL program provides economic relief to small businesses that are currently experiencing a temporary loss of revenue. The MSLP provided support to small and medium-sized businesses and their employees across the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic. UI programs provided unemployment benefits to eligible workers who became unemployed through no fault of their own.

The criminal cases charged by the Middle District of Florida COVID-19 Fraud Task Force have been investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Secret Service, the Internal Revenue Service—Criminal Investigation, the Department of Labor—Office of Inspector General, the U.S. Postal Service, the Federal Housing Finance Agency, the Small Business Administration, the Small Business Administration—Office of Inspector General, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation—Office of Inspector General, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Special Inspector General for Pandemic Recovery, Federal Reserve Board—Office of Inspector General, Department of Health and Human Services—Office of Inspector General, the Metropolitan Bureau of Investigation, the Tampa Police Department, the Orlando Police Department, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, the Manatee County Sheriff's Office, the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office, the Winter Park Police Department, the Osceola County Sheriff's Office, the Seminole County Sheriff's Office, and the Orange County Sheriff's Office. The cases are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys throughout the Middle District of Florida.

The Department of Justice needs the public's assistance in remaining vigilant and reporting suspected fraudulent activity. To report suspected fraud, contact the National Center for Disaster Fraud ("NCDF") at (866) 720-5721 or file an online complaint at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/webform/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>. Complaints filed will be reviewed at the NCDF and referred to federal, state, local, or international law enforcement or regulatory agencies for investigation.

United States Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Florida

COVID Fraud Criminal Cases

Charged Cases

Defendant(s) (Age)	Charge(s) <i>Max. Imprisonment</i>	Type of Fraud*	Intended Loss Amount
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Tampa Division

Alexander Alli	Wire fraud conspiracy <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>	EIDL	\$80k
Ellyn Pinkney	Wire fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>	EIDL	\$40k
Kieanna Garrett	Wire fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>	EIDL	\$40k

Nicole Bramble-King	Wire fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>	PPP	\$40k
Mehdi Tazi	Conspiracy <i>Maximum Prison Term: 5 years</i> Wire fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i> Aggravated identity theft <i>Maximum Prison Term: Two Years Consecutive</i>	UI	\$1.5M
Modupe Ogundele	Wire fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>	PPP	\$20k
Jalissa McDuffy	Wire fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>	PPP	\$41k
Devontaie Deravil	Aggravated identity theft	UI	\$480k

Maximum Prison Term: Two Years Consecutive

Access device fraud

Maximum Prison Term: 10 Years

Jordan Ross	Wire fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i> Illegal monetary transactions <i>Maximum Prison Term: 10 Years</i>	EIDL/PPP	\$1.3M
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Demarius Wilson	Wire fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>	PPP	\$18K
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These COVID Fraud cases from the Tampa Division are being handled by AUSAs Rachel Jones, Tiffany Fields, Greg Pizzo, Candace Rich, Jennifer Peresie, and Michael Kenneth

Orlando Division

Evan Edwards	Conspiracy to commit bank fraud	PPP	\$8M
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Joshua Edwards

Maximum Prison Term: 30 years

Bank fraud

Maximum Prison Term: 30 years

Visa fraud

Maximum Prison Term: 10 years

False statements

Maximum Prison Term: 30 years

Wire fraud

Emmet Bowens

Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years

Illegal monetary transactions

Maximum Prison Term: 10 Years

PPP

\$740k

Latesia Wilson

False Statements

Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years

HCF

\$2.6M

These COVID Fraud cases from the Orlando Division are being handled by AUSAs Kara Wick and Amanda Daniels

Jacksonville Division

Deonna Burke	Wire fraud	PPP	\$20k
	<i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>		

These COVID Fraud cases from the Jacksonville Division are being handled by AUSA Kevin Frein

Fort Myers Division

Venera Price	Mail fraud	ERAP	\$82k
	<i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>		

	Wire Fraud (T. Jolloff only)		
Timothy Jolloff	<i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>		
Lisa Jolloff	Money laundering	PPP/EIDL	\$3.4M
	<i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>		

Illegal monetary transactions

Maximum Prison Term: 10 Years

Diop McKenzie	Bank Fraud	EIDL/PPP	\$237K
	<i>Maximum Prison Term: 30 years</i>		
	Wire Fraud		
	<i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>		
	Aggravated Identity Theft		
	<i>Maximum: Prison Term: Two Years Consecutive</i>		

These COVID Fraud cases from the Fort Myers Division are being handled by AUSA Yolande Viacava and Trent Reichling

Ocala Division

Henry Wade	Wire Fraud	EIDL	\$500k
	<i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>		

This COVID Fraud case from the Ocala Division is being handled by AUSA Hannah Nowalk

Adjudicated Cases

Tampa Division

Joseph Abdo	Wire fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>	PPP	\$500k
	Illegal monetary transactions <i>Maximum Prison Term: 10 Years</i>		

Keaujay Hornsby	Racketeering conspiracy <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>	UI	\$3M
	Aggravated identity theft <i>Maximum Prison Term: Two Years Consecutive</i>		
	Access device fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 10 Years</i>		

Racketeering conspiracy

Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years

Aggravated identity theft

Maximum Prison Term: Two Years Consecutive

Access device fraud

Maximum Prison Term: 10 Years

Kareem Spann

UI

\$3M

Bank fraud

Maximum Prison Term: 30 Years

Money laundering

Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years

**Marqus Willard
Johnson**

PPP

\$500k

Bank fraud

Maximum Prison Term: 30 years

Charles Cunningham

PPP

\$800k

These COVID Fraud cases from the Tampa Division are being handled by AUSAs Rachel Jones, Diego Novaes, Tiffany Fields, Jennifer Peresie, and Greg Pizzo, and DOJ Trial Attorney John Scanlon

Orlando Division

Joseph Faubert	Bank Fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 30 years</i>	PPP	\$778k
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This COVID Fraud case from the Orlando Division is being handled by AUSAs Chauncey Bratt

Jacksonville Division

Kenneth Landers	Wire Fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i> Money Laundering <i>Maximum Prison Term: 30 Years</i>	PPP	\$1.4M
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Christopher Daragjati	Wire fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>	PPP	\$150k
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Theft of government funds

Maximum Prison Term: 10 Years

Aggravated identity theft

***Maximum: Prison Term: Two
Years Consecutive***

These COVID Fraud cases from the Jacksonville Division are being handled by AUSA Kevin Frein and Michael Coolican

Ocala Division

Passion Jackson	Wire Fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>	PPP	\$20K
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These COVID Fraud cases from the Ocala Division are being handled by AUSA Hannah Nowalk

Fort Myers Division

Ismaelle Manuel	Bank Fraud	PPP	\$280k
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Maximum Prison Term: 30 Years

Wire Fraud

Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years

Denis Casseus	Bank Fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 30 Years</i> Wire Fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>	PPP	\$298k
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These COVID Fraud cases from the Fort Myers Division are being handled by AUSA Yolande Viacava

Sentenced Cases

Tampa Division

Alexander Leszczynski	Wire fraud, bank fraud, illegal monetary transactions <i>Sentence Imposed: 17 and ½ years in federal prison</i>	PPP	\$1.1M
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<p>Louis Thornton, III</p>	<p>Wire Fraud</p> <p><i>Sentence Imposed: 42 months in federal prison</i></p>	<p>EIDL/PPP</p>	<p>\$815k</p>
<p>Kary Stevenson</p> <p>Corey Quinn</p>	<p>Conspiracy to commit access device fraud and aggravated identity theft</p> <p><i>Sentence Imposed: 5 years, 10 months in federal prison (Stevenson)</i></p> <p><i>Sentence Imposed: 7 years in federal prison (Quinn)</i></p>	<p>UI</p>	<p>\$1M</p>
<p>Bridgitte Keim</p>	<p>Bank fraud</p> <p><i>Sentence Imposed: 2 years in federal prison</i></p>	<p>PPP</p>	<p>\$588k</p>
<p>Wayne Ganaway</p>	<p>Conspiracy to commit wire fraud</p> <p><i>Sentence Imposed: 4 years in federal prison</i></p>	<p>EIDL</p>	<p>\$300k</p>

<p>Eriaius Bentley</p>	<p>Racketeering conspiracy, aggravated identity theft, access device fraud</p> <p><i>Sentence Imposed: One year in federal prison</i></p>	<p>UI</p>	<p>\$3M</p>
<p>Rolanda Wingfield</p>	<p>Access device fraud, Aggravated identity theft</p> <p><i>Sentenced Imposed: 3 years in federal prison</i></p>	<p>UI</p>	<p>\$135k</p>
<p>Tywon Spann</p>	<p>Racketeering conspiracy, aggravated identity theft, access device fraud</p> <p><i>Sentence Imposed: 6 years and 9 months in federal prison</i></p>	<p>UI</p>	<p>\$3M</p>
<p>Randy Jones</p>	<p>Wire fraud, aggravated identity theft</p> <p><i>Sentence Imposed: 5 years and 1 month in federal prison</i></p>	<p>EIDL/UI</p>	<p>\$250k</p>

Julio Lugo	Conspiracy to commit money laundering <i>Sentence Imposed: 7 years and 6 months in federal prison</i>	EIDL/PPP	\$4.4M
Keith Nicoletta	Conspiracy to commit money laundering <i>Sentence Imposed: 24 months in federal prison</i>	PPP	\$1.9M
Rosenide Venant	Conspiracy to commit money laundering <i>Sentence Imposed: 5 years in federal prison</i>	EIDL/PPP	\$413k
Melinda Hernandez	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud Wire fraud and aggravated identity theft <i>Sentence imposed: Three years and six months in federal prison</i>	UI	\$1.5M

Bri'antina Mills	Wire fraud and theft of government funds <i>Sentence imposed: 15 months in federal prison</i>		\$10K
Jorge Gutierrez Echeverria	Wire fraud <i>Sentence imposed: Two years and six months in federal prison</i>	EIDL	\$150k
Omar Esquivel Bello	Wire fraud <i>Sentence imposed: 15 months in federal prison</i>	EIDL	\$242k
Steve Moodie	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud, wire fraud, aggravated identity theft <i>Sentence imposed: 5 years and 10 months in federal prison</i>	UI	\$1.5M
Richard Simpkins	Conspiracy to commit money laundering	PPP	\$1.9M

Sentence imposed: 5 years and 10 months in federal prison

Devaris McClain	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud, access device fraud Sentence imposed: 5 years and 1 month in federal prison	UI	\$85K
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These COVID Fraud cases from the Tampa Division were handled by AUSAs Rachel Jones, Greg Pizzo, Tiffany Fields, Diego Novaes, Jennifer Peresie, and SAUSA Chris Poor

Orlando Division

Daniel Johnson	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud, aggravated identity theft, unlawful transfer of firearm <i>Sentence Imposed: 7 years, 6 months in federal prison</i>	UI	\$2.3M
Jacquavius Smith	Possession of short-barreled rifle; felon in possession of	PPP	\$10k

	firearm; and aggravated identity theft <i>Sentence Imposed: 7 years, 1 month in federal prison</i>		
Johnson Eustache	Wire fraud <i>Sentence Imposed: 5 years in federal prison</i>	EIDL/PPP	\$2.2M
Joseph Harrison	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud <i>Sentence Imposed: 12 months in federal prison</i>	UI	\$2.1M
Tomas Ziupsnys	Conspiracy to commit bank fraud; bank fraud; aggravated identity theft <i>Sentence Imposed: 5 years in federal prison</i>	PPP	\$2M
Holly Urban	Conspiracy to commit bank fraud	PPP	\$1.5M

	<i>Sentence Imposed: 30 months in federal prison</i>		
Joel Greenberg	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud and other offenses while on pretrial release <i>Sentence Imposed: 11 years in federal prison</i>	EIDL	\$430k
Don Cisternino	Wire fraud, illegal monetary transactions, and aggravated identity theft <i>Sentence Imposed: 8 years and 6 months in federal prison</i>	PPP	\$7.2M
Keith Ingersoll	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud, wire fraud, aggravated identity theft <i>Sentence imposed: 9 years, 1 month in federal prison.</i>	EIDL	\$66k

Jaheim Davis	Access device fraud and aggravated identity theft <i>Sentence imposed: 3 years, 6 months in federal prison.</i>	UI	\$219k
Teresa McIntyre	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud and other offenses <i>Sentence Imposed: 5 years' probation</i>	EIDL	\$730k
Brian Blake	Possession of device-making equipment, access device fraud, aggravated identity theft <i>Sentence Imposed: 9 years and 8 months in federal prison</i>	PPP/UI	\$832k

These COVID Fraud cases from the Orlando Division were handled by AUSAs John Gardella, Amanda Daniels, Chauncey Bratt, Emily Chang, Shannon Laurie, and Jennifer Harrington, and U.S. Attorney Roger Handberg

Jacksonville Division

Jacob Byrd	Wire fraud <i>Sentence Imposed: probation</i>	PPP	\$10k
Desmond Williams	Wire fraud conspiracy, wire fraud <i>Sentenced Imposed: 5 years' probation</i>	PPP	\$40k

This COVID Fraud case from the Jacksonville Division was handled by AUSA Kevin Frein

Fort Myers Division

Casey Crowther	Bank fraud, false statement to a financial institution, illegal monetary transaction <i>Sentence Imposed: 3 years, 1 month in federal prison</i>	PPP	\$2.7M
Anthony Bruey Amber Bruey	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud, wire fraud, conspiracy to	PPP/EIDL	\$881k

	<p>commit money laundering, illegal monetary transactions</p> <p><i>Sentence Imposed:</i></p> <p><i>Anthony Bruey: 4 years, 3 months in federal prison</i></p> <p><i>Amber Bruey: 4 years in federal prison</i></p>		
Edrica Leann Watson	<p>False statement to a lending institution</p> <p><i>Sentence Imposed: 15 months in federal prison</i></p>	PPP	\$392k
Daniel Joseph Tisone	<p>Wire fraud, bank fraud, money laundering, aggravated identity theft, possession of ammunition by a prohibited person</p> <p><i>Sentence Imposed: 7 years in federal prison</i></p>	PPP/EIDL/MSLP	\$10.7M

Wire fraud

Liliana Gonzalez

Sentence Imposed: 5 years of probation with 18 months of home confinement

PPP

\$169k

Bank fraud

Al Clint LaRoche

Sentence Imposed: Two years in federal prison

PPP

\$1M

These COVID Fraud cases from the Fort Myers Division were handled by AUSAs Trent Reichling, Michael Leeman, and Jesus M. Casas

Ocala Division

Wire Fraud

Lavelle Harris

Sentence Imposed: Two years and three months in federal prison

PPP

\$1.2M

This COVID Fraud case from the Ocala Division was handled by AUSA Hannah Nowalk

Types of Fraud*

Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL)

Paycheck Protection Program (PPP)

Unemployment Insurance (UI)

Main Street Lending Program (MSLP)

Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP)

Health Care Fraud (HCF)

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Topics

CORONAVIRUS

DISASTER FRAUD

FINANCIAL FRAUD

Component

[USAO - Florida, Middle](#)