

Middlesex County Woman Admits to COVID-19 Relief Program Fraud

Wednesday, June 25, 2025

For Immediate Release

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

TRENTON, N.J. – A Middlesex County, New Jersey, woman admitted that she fraudulently obtained Economic Injury Disaster Loan (“EIDL”), Paycheck Protection Program (“PPP”), and pandemic unemployment insurance benefits, U.S. Attorney Alina Habba announced.

Damaris Valerio, a/k/a Damaris Tineo Abreu, 42, of Perth Amboy, New Jersey, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Robert Kirsch to an information charging her with one count of wire fraud and one count of money laundering.

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

From April 2020 through December 2021, Valerio fraudulently obtained \$194,212 in COVID-19 emergency relief funds, which included loans and cash advances meant for distressed small businesses under the EIDL program and PPP, and pandemic unemployment insurance benefits meant for unemployed workers, by submitting false and fraudulent applications inflating her business’s revenues, payroll expenses, and number of employees. After receiving the fraudulent funds, she diverted proceeds from the relief programs for her personal gain.

The wire fraud charge carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a maximum fine of \$250,000, or twice the gross gain to the defendant or gross loss to the victim, whichever is greater. The money laundering charge count carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine, or twice the gross gain to the defendant or loss to the victim, whichever is greatest. Sentencing is scheduled for October 28, 2025.

U.S. Attorney Habba credited special agents of U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Ricky J. Patel in Newark; 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, and special agents of the Social Security Administration, Office of the Inspector

General's Boston-New York Field Division, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Amy Connelly, with the investigation leading to this guilty plea.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Benjamin D. Bleiberg and Fatime Meka Cano of the Economic Crimes Unit in Newark.

The District of New Jersey COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Strike Force is one of five strike forces established throughout the United States by the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate and prosecute COVID-19 fraud. The strike forces focus on large-scale, multi-state pandemic relief fraud perpetrated by criminal organizations and transnational actors. The strike forces are interagency law enforcement efforts, using prosecutor-led and data analyst-driven teams designed to identify and bring to justice those who stole pandemic relief funds.

Anyone with information about allegations of attempted fraud involving COVID-19 can report it by calling the Department of Justice's National Center for Disaster Fraud Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

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Defense Counsel: John Russo, Esq, of New York.

[valerio.information.pdf](#)

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