

PRESS RELEASE

Passaic County Lawyer Admits Fraudulently Obtaining More Than \$300,000 in COVID-19 Relief Funds

Thursday, November 2, 2023

For Immediate Release

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

NEWARK, N.J. – A Passaic County, New Jersey, attorney today admitted that he illegally obtained more than \$300,000 in COVID-19 relief funds, U.S. Attorney Philip R. Sellinger announced.

Morton Chirnomas, 61, of Clifton, New Jersey, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Christine P. O'Hearn in Camden federal court to an information charging him with wire fraud.

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

From May 2020 to September 2020, Chirnomas fraudulently obtained a \$150,000 loan through the COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loans program. He also falsely obtained \$200,000 in unemployment insurance benefits using the names and identities of other people without their authorization.

The charge of wire fraud is punishable by a maximum potential penalty of 20 years in prison and a fine of the greater of \$250,000, twice the gross profits to Chirnomas or twice the gross loss suffered by the victims. Sentencing is scheduled for June 17, 2024.

U.S. Attorney Sellinger credited postal inspectors with the U.S. Postal Inspection Service in Newark, under the direction of Inspector in Charge Christopher A. Nielsen, Philadelphia Division; special agents of the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, New York Region, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Jonathan

Mellone; and special agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge James E. Dennehy in Newark, with the investigation leading to the guilty plea.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Andrew Kogan of the U.S. Attorney's Office Cybercrime 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>.

[chirnmoas.information.pdf](#) (116.76 KB)

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