

PRESS RELEASE

Romance Scammer Sentenced to 10 Years in Federal Prison, Ordered to Pay \$2.2M in Restitution

Tuesday, March 19, 2024

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of Texas

An Aubrey woman was sentenced Monday to 10 years in prison and ordered to pay more than \$2.2 million in restitution for defrauding elderly victims in romance schemes, announced U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Texas Leigha Simonton.

Ijeoma Okoro, 33, was indicted in September 2021 and proceeded to trial in December 2023. After seven days of trial and 10 hours of deliberation, a jury convicted her of one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering. She was sentenced by Chief U.S. District Judge David Godbey to 10 years on each count, to run concurrently.

According to evidence presented at trial, Ms. Okoro and other fraudsters assumed fake names and trolled dating sites like Match.com and Zoosk, searching for targets.

Once the fraudsters ingratiated themselves to their often divorced or widowed victims with promises of long-term commitment, the fraudsters concocted elaborate stories about why they needed financial assistance. A common story was that the fraudster had to travel overseas for work and was unable to access his bank accounts. As a part of the story, the fraudster often claimed to experience an unexpected work-related crisis or a sudden family medical emergency. The fraudster then asked the victims for money to cover the expenses and promised to repay them in the near future.

Trusting victims sent thousands of dollars to bank accounts opened by the defendant and her coconspirators in the Northern District of Texas. The defendant then distributed the fraudulent proceeds to coconspirators and retained a portion for herself.

At Monday's sentencing hearing, Chief Judge Godbey applied a sentencing enhancement for the defendant's obstruction of the administration of justice, finding

that Ms. Okoro committed perjury when she testified at trial that she never conspired with anyone to commit fraud or money laundering.

To date, four other codefendants have also been convicted for their involvement in the scheme, including: David Animashaun, sentenced to 24 months in federal prison for two counts of conspiracy to commit wire fraud; Oluwalobamise Michael Moses, sentenced to 24 months in federal prison for two counts of conspiracy to commit wire fraud; Emanuel Stanley Orji, sentenced to 37 months in federal prison for conspiracy to commit wire fraud; and Frederick Orji, sentenced to 37 months in federal prison for conspiracy to commit wire fraud. The remaining indicted codefendant, Chukwuemeka Orji, remains a fugitive.

IRS – Criminal Investigation led the investigation with assistance from the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Frisco Field Office, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Labor - Office of the Inspector General. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Mary Walters, Jenna Rudoff, and Elyse Lyons prosecuted the case.

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