

PRESS RELEASE

Shelton Man Admits Fraudulently Obtaining COVID-19 Relief Funds

Monday, March 3, 2025

For Immediate Release

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

Marc H. Silverman, Acting United States Attorney for the District of Connecticut, today announced that on February 28, 2025, VINCENZO MINUTOLO, 38, of Shelton, waived his right to be indicted and pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Kari A. Dooley in Bridgeport to offenses related to his fraudulent receipt of COVID-19 relief funds.

According to court documents and statements made in court, on March 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided emergency financial assistance to Americans suffering the economic effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. One source of relief provided by the CARES Act was the authorization of forgivable loans to small businesses for job retention and certain other expenses through the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). In April 2020, Congress authorized more than \$300 billion in additional PPP funding. The PPP allowed qualifying small businesses and other organizations to receive unsecured loans at an interest rate of 1%. PPP loan proceeds were to be used by businesses on payroll costs, interest on mortgages, rent and utilities. The PPP allowed the interest and principal to be forgiven if businesses spent the proceeds on these expenses within a certain period of time of receipt and used at least a certain percentage of the amount to be forgiven for payroll.

The PPP was overseen by the Small Business Administration, which has authority over all PPP loans. Individual PPP loans, however, were issued by private approved lenders, which received and processed PPP applications and supporting documentation, and then made loans using the lenders' own funds, which were guaranteed by the SBA.

Minutolo claimed an ownership interest or representative relationship with City Sounds Productions LLC ("City Sounds"). Between March and September 2021, Minutolo defrauded the PPP loan program of more than \$145,000 by providing false information on loan applications for City Sounds, including overstating the yearly gross income for City Sounds; misrepresenting that similar PPP loans had not been or would not be sought when he had, in fact, sought and obtained, and intended to seek and obtain,

such loans; and providing fraudulent IRS tax filings and tax payment vouchers for City Sounds that had, in fact, never been filed with the IRS. Similarly, on the forgiveness applications he submitted, Minutolo materially misrepresented having complied with all the requirements of the PPP rules.

In addition, the CARES Act created a new temporary federal unemployment insurance program for pandemic unemployment assistance ("Pandemic Unemployment Assistance"). Pandemic Unemployment Assistance provided unemployment insurance ("UI") benefits for employed individuals who are not eligible for other types of UI due to their employment status. The CARES Act also created a new temporary federal program called Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation ("FPUC") that provided additional weekly benefits to those eligible for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance or regular UI. The Connecticut Department of Labor (CT-DOL) administers UI benefits for residents of Connecticut.

Between March 2020 and April 2021, Minutolo defrauded the CT-DOL of at least \$86,000, and as much as approximately \$273,000, by providing the CT-DOL with fraudulent Pandemic Unemployment Assistance applications seeking unemployment insurance payments in others' names, including individuals who had died, and individuals who did not know that their name and sometimes other personal information was being used. One fraudulent application was for Minutolo's grandfather, who died in 2014, and included a telephone number associated with Minutolo. Minutolo continued to make online weekly certifications to the CT-DOL attesting that the information contained in his grandfather's application, and other applications, were true in order to receive continued unemployment insurance benefits.

Minutolo pleaded guilty to two counts of wire fraud, an offense that carries a maximum term of imprisonment of 20 years on each count. Judge Dooley scheduled sentencing for May 23. Minutolo is released on a \$50,000 bond pending sentencing.

This matter is being investigated by Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) and the U.S. Department of Labor Office of the Inspector General. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Christopher W. Schmeisser.

Individuals with information about allegations of fraud involving COVID-19 are encouraged to 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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