



THE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT *of* JUSTICE

United States Attorney's Office
Southern District of Florida

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, September 30, 2024

**South Florida U.S. Attorney's Office Charges an Attorney,
Former SBA Employee, Tax Preparer, and others with
COVID-19 Fraud Schemes**

MIAMI – The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida remains a leader in COVID-19 pandemic relief prosecutions, holding a range of actors accountable for these crimes. Over this summer alone, the district has charged 17 individuals with COVID-19 relief fraud cases, with scheme amounts totaling over \$21 million.

In 2021, the Attorney General established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. In 2022, the Southern District of Florida's U.S. Attorney's Office was selected to head one of three national COVID-19 Fraud Strike Force Teams. Together, with federal, state and local law enforcement partners, the U.S. Attorney's Office targets fraudsters that took advantage of programs that offered assistance during the pandemic. Since the pandemic, more than 185 people have been charged in the Southern District of Florida for schemes involving more than around \$220 million.

“These defendants have in common a willingness to exploit federal programs created to help people in a global pandemic for their own gain,” stated U.S. Attorney Markenzy Lapointe for the Southern District of Florida. “The U.S. Attorney's Office and our law enforcement partners will continue to uncover COVID-19 related financial fraud schemes and hold people accountable – regardless of their role in the community. We will not allow limited federal tax dollars, which were intended to provide a lifeline to small businesses as they struggled to stay afloat during the economically devastating pandemic lockdown, to be stolen to support criminal actors.”

“The Department of Justice remains committed to the prosecution of those who engaged in COVID-19 benefits program fraud and the return of recovered funds to the American taxpayers. I appreciate the dedication of the prosecutors and investigators who brought these people to justice and worked to protect the integrity of our federal benefits programs,” said Mandy Riedel, Director of COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement.

The following cases were charged this summer.

Cases Against Federal Employees

A number of federal employees and former federal employees have been charged with COVID loan schemes, including:

- **U.S. v. Malaina Chapman, Case No. 24-CR-20321:** Chapman, 37, of Hialeah, Fla., a former SBA employee, was indicted in July 2024. The indictment alleges that, while employed by the SBA, Chapman became involved in multiple schemes to defraud the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program, as well as to defraud local credit unions and local and state programs designed to assist those affected by the Covid-19 pandemic pay their rent. United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General (USPS OIG) and the U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Inspector General (SBA OIG) investigated this case. This case is being handled by Assistant U.S. Attorney Daniel Bernstein.

“Fraudulent exploitation of SBA's pandemic relief programs diverts critical resources from the small businesses that truly need them,” said Amaleka McCall-Brathwaite, Special Agent in Charge of the SBA OIG’s Eastern Region. “Our office is committed to protecting taxpayer funds and ensuring that individuals who attempt to defraud SBA programs are brought to justice. I want to thank the U.S. Attorney’s office and our law enforcement partners for their collaboration and dedication to justice.”

Unemployment Insurance Fraud

A number of defendants in Florida were charged with defrauding the California Employment Development Department of millions of dollars by making false claims for unemployment with the personally identifiable information of the victims of identity theft. These cases were investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General (DOL OIG), SBA OIG, and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

This includes:

- **U.S. v. Harold Eubanks and Myotha Francois, Case No. 24-CR-20335:** handled by Assistant U.S. Attorney Roger Cruz.
- **U.S. v. Kenneth Dikari Stevens, Jr. and Giovanni Kymani Paul Matthews, Case No. 24-CR-20293:** handled by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Sean Cronin and Aimee Jimenez.
- **U.S. v. Zachary Ramyard, Case No. 24-CR-20382:** handled by Assistant U.S. Attorney Joesph Egozi.

“These cases represent the continued commitment of the FBI and many other federal agencies to identify and hold accountable those who engaged in COVID relief fraud,” said Jeffrey B. Veltri, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI’s Miami Field Office. “The intent of these programs was to provide a financial safety net to eligible businesses during a time of economic duress – not as a way for criminals to fund their lifestyles. While the relief programs have ended, our pursuit of the fraudsters has not. The amount of fraud we’ve seen is staggering. We continue to work hard every day to investigate these fraud schemes and protect the public from being swindled.”

COVID-19 Procurement Fraud

This office continues to investigate and pursue individuals who capitalized on the pandemic by illegally profiting on personal protective equipment (PPE), including:

- **U.S. v. Nabil Nahlah, Case No. 24-CR-20434:** Nahlah, 49, of Miami Beach, Fla., was charged with one count of fraud against the United States, arising from his efforts to sell millions of dollars of PPE to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to allegations contained in the charging documents filed Sept. 25, Nahlah, through his company The Noble Attorney, made bids on various procurement requests from the VA for items like medical masks and examination gloves. Nahlah won the contracts by making false and fraudulent representations to the VA, namely by claiming that his firm was an authorized distributor or reseller of the PPE manufacturers and that he had the qualifying PPE in stock and available for immediate delivery. Nahlah furthered the scheme to defraud the VA by creating a fake web domain and email address for a PPE manufacturer and using it to submit a phony authorized distributor letter to the VA. Once awarded the lucrative contracts, Nahlah shipped non-conforming PPE to the VA, including counterfeit medical masks. This case was investigated by the VA Office of Inspector General’s (VA OIG) and the FDA Office of Criminal

Investigations. This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Jon Juenger.

- **U.S. v. Rodrigo Mera, Case No. 24-CR-20148:** In August 2024, Mera pled guilty to stealing gloves and other PPE from his employer during the pandemic. Mera admitted he sold the stolen PPE under false pretenses and profited over \$1 million. This case was investigated by the United States Secret Service (USSS). This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Daniel Bernstein.

“The charges included in today’s announcement highlight the VA Office of Inspector General’s dedication throughout the pandemic to protect veterans and VA employees from those who would exploit the opportunity for fraudulent gain,” said Special Agent in Charge David Spilker with the VA OIG Southeast Field Office. “The VA OIG remains steadfast in our commitment to work with our law enforcement partners to ensure the integrity of VA’s vital supply chain.”

“The FDA continues to monitor the marketplace to ensure that medical devices are safe and effective for American consumers,” said Special Agent in Charge Justin Fielder, FDA Office of Criminal Investigations’ Miami Field Office. “Today’s announcement should serve as a reminder that the FDA is continuing to collaborate with our fellow law enforcement partners to bring to justice those who place profits above the public health.”

Cases Against COVID-19 Loan Preparers

A number of loan preparers have been charged, including:

- **U.S. v. Pete Andrew Cohen, Case No. 24-CR-60017:** Cohen, 56 of Miramar, Fla., was the president of Taxez Taxez Taxez Incorporation in Miramar. From June 2020 through June 2021, the defendant caused the filing of approximately \$3 million in fraudulent PPP loan applications that falsely and fraudulently inflated the number of employees and payroll figures for the applicants. The defendant also arranged for PPP loan borrowers to create false and fraudulent payroll information using a payroll service. Cohen pled guilty and is scheduled to be sentenced on Oct. 17, before U.S. District Judge Rodney Smith. This case was investigated by Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI) and Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation Office of Inspector General (FDIC-OIG). This case is being prosecuted by Senior Litigation Counsel Michael N. Berger.
- **U.S. v. Marc Prince, Case No. 24-CR-20214:** Prince, 41 of Miramar, reached out to various small business owners, directly or indirectly, to offer to obtain PPP loans. From June 2020 through April 2021, Prince caused the

filing of approximately \$3 million in fraudulent PPP loan applications that falsely and fraudulently inflated the number of employees and payroll figures for the applicants. Prince charged a fee, typically, of around 20 percent of the value of the PPP loan. Prince pled guilty and is scheduled to be sentenced on Oct. 17, before U.S. District Judge Darrin P. Gayles. This case was investigated by IRS-CI, FDIC-OIG, and HSI. This case is being prosecuted by Senior Litigation Counsel Michael N. Berger.

“These charges demonstrate the FDIC OIG's commitment to working with our law enforcement partners to investigate allegations of fraud in COVID-19 relief programs and other financial crimes that threaten to undermine the safety and soundness of our Nation's financial institutions,” said Special Agent in Charge Kyle A. Myles, of the FDIC OIG Atlanta Region.

“It has been four years after the enactment of a key pandemic-era law and IRS-CI still continues to investigate cases related to the CARES Act,” said Matthew D. Line, Special Agent in Charge of the IRS-CI Miami Field Office. “These cases cover a wide range of criminal activity, including tax, money laundering, fraudulently obtained loans, credits and payments meant for American workers, families, and small businesses. In the last year alone, IRS-CI has opened nearly 700 new COVID fraud investigations nationwide that collectively add up to \$5 billion. If you committed fraud, know that we are working hard every single day to find you and hold you accountable.”

Theft of Employee Retention Credit Checks

This office has charged the theft of employee retention checks, for example:

- **U.S. v. Madelein Olivia, Case No. 24-CR-20323:** Olivia, 52, of Miami, was indicted by a grand jury for stealing a \$7 million Employee Retention Credit (ERC) check issued to a victim business where she was not employed. ERC checks are refundable tax credits for certain eligible businesses and tax-exempt organizations that had employees and were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) investigated the case. This case is being handled by Assistant U.S. Attorney Altanese Phenelus.

An indictment, information, and complaint contain mere allegations. All defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty in a court of law.

For more information regarding the Department of Justice's response to the pandemic visit <https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus>. Additional information

regarding the Strike Force may be found at <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-covid-19-fraud-strike-force-teams>.

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 (NCDF) Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

Related court documents and information may be found on the website of the District Court for the Southern District of Florida at www.flsd.uscourts.gov or at <http://pacer.flsd.uscourts.gov> under the case numbers referenced above.

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