Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of Massachusetts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE Friday, October 14, 2022

Boston Man Pleads Guilty to Identity Theft and Unemployment Fraud Related to COVID-19 Pandemic

BOSTON – A Boston man pleaded guilty yesterday in connection with using others' identities to fraudulently obtain over $65,000 in Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) benefits.

Wilson Radhames Peguero Brea, 53, pleaded guilty to one count of wire fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft. U.S. District Court Chief Judge F. Dennis Saylor IV scheduled sentencing for Jan. 11, 2023. Peguero was arrested and charged in December 2021.

According to the charging documents, Peguero used the name and Social Security number of a U.S. citizen to apply for and obtain PUA benefits. Peguero also applied for and received additional PUA benefits using another victim's identity as well as his own.

The charge of wire fraud provides for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, up to three years of supervised release and a fine of $250,000 or twice the gross gain or loss, whichever is greater. The charge of aggravated identity theft provides for a mandatory sentence of two years in prison, to be served consecutively to any other sentence imposed, up to one year of supervised release and a fine of $250,000. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and statutes which govern the determination of a sentence in a criminal case.

United States Attorney Rachael S. Rollins and Matthew B. Millhollin, Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations in New England made the announcement. Valuable assistance was provided by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General; U.S. Department of State, Diplomatic Security Service; U.S. Postal Inspection Service; Massachusetts State Police; and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services in Boston. Assistant U.S. Attorney Benjamin A. Saltzman of Rollins' Criminal Division is prosecuting the case.

The investigation was conducted by Homeland Security's Investigation's Document and Benefit Fraud Task Force (DBFTF), a specialized field investigative group comprised of personnel from various local, state, and federal agencies with expertise in detecting, deterring, and disrupting organizations and individuals involved in various types of document, identity, and benefit fraud schemes.

On May 17, 2021, the Attorney General established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with agencies across government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. The Task Force bolsters efforts to investigate and prosecute the most culpable domestic and international criminal actors and assists agencies tasked with administering relief programs to prevent fraud by, among other methods, augmenting and incorporating existing coordination mechanisms, identifying resources and techniques to uncover fraudulent actors and their schemes, and sharing and harnessing information and insights gained from prior enforcement efforts. For more information on the Department's response to the pandemic, please visit https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus.

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.

Topic(s):
Coronavirus

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