

Middle District Of Florida Task Force Continues To Combat COVID-19 Fraud

Wednesday, January 17, 2024

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Middle District of Florida

Tampa, FL – United States Attorney Roger B. Handberg announces the results achieved by the Middle District of Florida's efforts to combat fraud related to COVID-19. Those efforts have included complementary actions by the United States Attorney's Office's (USAO-MDFL) Criminal, Asset Recovery, Appellate, and Civil Divisions, along with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies.

"The Middle District of Florida United States Attorney's Office continues to pursue, investigate, prosecute, and recover money from those who were engaged in major or sophisticated fraud schemes designed to steal benefits intended for Americans coping with the myriad impacts of the pandemic," said U.S. Attorney Roger Handberg.

On the criminal enforcement front, the USAO-MDFL and federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies combined resources in March 2020 to form the Middle District of Florida COVID-19 Fraud Task Force to identify, investigate, and prosecute fraud related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Since its inception, the Task Force has prosecuted 77 defendants for fraud schemes designed to exploit federal programs including the Paycheck Protection Program ("PPP"), Economic Injury Disaster Loans ("EIDL"), Unemployment Insurance ("UI"), the Main Street Lending Program ("MSLP"), the Emergency Rental Assistance Program ("ERAP"), as well as government Healthcare programs such as Medicare ("HCF"). Collectively, these defendants sought to defraud the United States of over \$85 million. Fifty-six of those defendants have already been found guilty, while prosecution remains pending against 21 defendants. (*See chart for criminal case details.*) In fiscal year 2023, the Task Force indicted 26 COVID-19 fraud related cases in which defendants sought to obtain more than \$15 million from the various federal programs.

For example, in October 2023, U.S. District Judge Thomas P. Barber sentenced [Denis Casseus](#) to two years in federal prison for bank fraud and an illegal monetary transaction. As part of his sentence, the court also entered an order of forfeiture in the amount of \$298,875, the proceeds of the bank fraud. According to court documents, Casseus submitted two fraudulent PPP applications, in which he falsely represented that the PPP funds would be used only for business-related purposes, as specified in the loan applications. Instead, Casseus used a portion of the fraudulent-obtained money for the purchase a residence in Cape Coral.

In a separate matter, United States District Judge Kathryn Mizelle sentenced [Vitalii Chychasov](#) to eight years in federal prison for conspiracy to commit access device fraud and trafficking in unauthorized access devices. Chychasov was an administrator of a series of websites that sold Social Security numbers. During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, traffic to and purchases on the website increased dramatically due to individuals purchasing Social Security numbers and other personal information in order to commit COVID-19 fraud, primarily unemployment insurance fraud.

Further, the USAO-MDFL's Asset Recovery Division and federal seizing agencies have completed the forfeiture of more than \$20 million of EIDL, UI, and PPP funds that were fraudulently obtained, depriving the fraudsters of their ill-gotten gains and recovering the proceeds for the victims. More than \$18 million in additional pandemic fraud proceeds have been seized and are pending civil or criminal forfeiture.

The U.S. Attorney General has 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. For more information on the department's response to the pandemic, please visit <https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus>.

Through the PPP, the federal government authorized over \$600 billion in forgivable loans to small businesses for job retention and certain other expenses through the PPP. The EIDL program provides economic relief to small businesses that are currently experiencing a temporary loss of revenue. The MSLP provided support to small and medium-sized businesses and their employees across the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic. UI programs provided unemployment benefits to eligible workers who became unemployed through no fault of their own.

The criminal cases charged by the Middle District of Florida COVID-19 Fraud Task Force have been investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Secret Service, Internal Revenue Service—Criminal Investigation, the Department of Labor—Office of Inspector General, the U.S. Postal Service, the Federal Housing Finance Agency, the

Small Business Administration, the Small Business Administration—Office of Inspector General, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation—Office of Inspector General, Homeland Security Investigations, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Special Inspector General for Pandemic Recovery, Federal Reserve Board—Office of Inspector General, Department of Health and Human Services—Office of Inspector General, the Metropolitan Bureau of Investigation, the Tampa Police Department, the Orlando Police Department, the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office, the Manatee County Sheriff’s Office, the Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Office, the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office, the Winter Park Police Department, the Osceola County Sheriff’s Office, the Seminole County Sheriff’s Office, and the Orange County Sheriff’s Office. The cases are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys throughout the Middle District of Florida.

The Department of Justice needs the public’s assistance in remaining vigilant and reporting suspected fraudulent activity. To report suspected fraud, contact the National Center for Disaster Fraud (“NCDF”) at (866) 720-5721 or file an online complaint at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/webform/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>. Complaints filed will be reviewed at the NCDF and referred to federal, state, local, or international law enforcement or regulatory agencies for investigation.

United States Attorney’s Office for the Middle District of Florida

COVID Fraud Criminal Cases

Charged Cases

Defendant(s) (Age)	Charge(s) <i>Max. Imprisonment</i>	Type of Fraud*	Intended Loss Amount
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Tampa Division

Alexander Alli	Wire fraud conspiracy <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>	EIDL	\$80k
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Ellyn Pinkney	Wire fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>	EIDL	\$40k
Kieanna Garrett	Wire fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>	EIDL	\$40k
Nicole Bramble-King	Wire fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>	PPP	\$40k
<mehdi< a="" style="box-sizing: inherit;">Mehdi Tazi</mehdi<>	Conspiracy <i>Maximum Prison Term: 5 years</i> Wire fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i> Aggravated identity theft <i>Maximum Prison Term: Two Years Consecutive</i>	UI	\$1.5M
Modupe Ogundele	Wire fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>	PPP	\$20k
Devontaie Deravil	Aggravated identity theft <i>Maximum Prison Term: Two Years Consecutive</i> Access device fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 10 Years</i>	UI	\$480k

Jordan Ross	Wire fraud	EIDL/PPP	\$1.3M
	<i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>		
	Illegal monetary transactions		
	<i>Maximum Prison Term: 10 Years</i>		
Demarius Wilson	Wire fraud	PPP	\$18k
	<i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>		
Tommy Louisville	Wire fraud	PPP	\$33k
	<i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>		
Dawn Ogundele	Theft of government funds	PPP	\$20k
	<i>Maximum Prison Term: 10 years</i>		
	False statement to obtain federal employees' compensation		
	<i>Maximum Prison Term: 5 years</i>		
	Wire fraud		
	<i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>		

These COVID Fraud cases from the Tampa Division are being handled by AUSAs Rachel Jones, Tiffany Fields, Greg Pizzo, Candace Rich, Jennifer Peresie, and Michael Kenneth

Orlando Division

Evan Edwards	Conspiracy to commit bank fraud	PPP	\$8M
Joshua Edwards			

Maximum Prison Term: 30 years

Bank fraud

Maximum Prison Term: 30 years

Visa fraud

Maximum Prison Term: 10 years

False statements

Maximum Prison Term: 30 years

Emmet Bowens	Wire fraud	PPP	\$740k
	<i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>		
	Illegal monetary transactions		
	<i>Maximum Prison Term: 10 Years</i>		

Latresia Wilson	False statements	HCF	\$2.6M
	<i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>		

These COVID Fraud cases from the Orlando Division are being handled by AUSAs Kara Wick, Amanda Daniels, and DOJ Trial Attorney Keith Clouser

Jacksonville Division

James Wigg	Wire Fraud	PPP	\$476k
	<i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 years</i>		

This COVID Fraud case from the Jacksonville Division is being handled by AUSA Tysen Duva

Fort Myers Division

Venera Price	Mail fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>	ERAP	\$82k
Timothy Jolloff	Wire fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i> Money laundering <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i> Illegal monetary transactions <i>Maximum Prison Term: 10 Years</i>	PPP/EIDL	\$2.1M
Lisa Jolloff	Money laundering <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i> Illegal monetary transactions <i>Maximum Prison Term: 10 Years</i>	PPP/EIDL	
Diop McKenzie	Bank fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 30 years</i> Wire fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i> Aggravated identity theft <i>Maximum: Prison Term: Two Years Consecutive</i>	EIDL/PPP	\$237k

These COVID Fraud cases from the Fort Myers Division are being handled by AUSAs Yolande Viacava and Trent Reichling

Ocala Division

Henry Wade	Wire fraud	EIDL	\$500k
	Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years		

This COVID Fraud case from the Ocala Division is being handled by AUSA Hannah Nowalk

Adjudicated Cases

Tampa Division

	Wire fraud		
	Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years		
Joseph Abdo	Illegal monetary transactions	PPP	\$500k
	Maximum Prison Term: 10 Years		

Keaujay Hornsby	Racketeering conspiracy		
	Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years		
	Aggravated identity theft	UI	\$3M

	Maximum Prison Term: Two Years Consecutive		
	Access device fraud		
	Maximum Prison Term: 10 Years		
	Racketeering conspiracy		
	Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years		
Kareem Spann	Aggravated identity theft	UI	\$3M
	Maximum Prison Term: Two Years Consecutive		
	Access device fraud		
	Maximum Prison Term: 10 Years		
	Bank fraud		
	Maximum Prison Term: 30 Years		
Marqus Willard Johnson	Money laundering	PPP	\$500k
	Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years		

Charles Cunningham	Bank fraud	PPP	\$800k
	<i>Maximum Prison</i>		
	<i>Term: 30 years</i>		

These COVID Fraud cases from the Tampa Division are being handled by AUSAs Rachel Jones, Diego Novaes, Tiffany Fields, Jennifer Peresie, and Greg Pizzo, and DOJ Trial Attorney John Scanlon

Orlando Division

Joseph Faubert	Bank fraud	PPP	\$778k
	<i>Maximum Prison</i>		
	<i>Term: 30 years</i>		

This COVID Fraud case from the Orlando Division is being handled by AUSAs Chauncey Bratt

Jacksonville Division

Christopher Daragjati	Wire fraud	PPP	\$150k
	<i>Maximum Prison</i>		
	<i>Term: 20 Years</i>		
	Theft of government funds		
	<i>Maximum Prison</i>		
	<i>Term: 10 Years</i>		
Aggravated identity theft			

***Maximum: Prison
Term: Two Years
Consecutive***

This COVID Fraud case from the Jacksonville Division is being handled by AUSAs Kevin Frein and Michael Coolican

Ocala Division

Passion Jackson	Wire fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>	PPP	\$20K
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This COVID Fraud case from the Ocala Division is being handled by AUSA Hannah Nowalk

Fort Myers Division

Evan Graves	Wire fraud <i>Maximum Prison Term: 20 Years</i>	EIDL	\$1.3M
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This COVID Fraud case from the Fort Myers Division is being handled by AUSAs Yolande Viacava and Simon Eth

Sentenced Cases

Tampa Division

Alexander Leszczynski	Wire fraud, bank fraud, illegal monetary transactions <i>Sentence Imposed: 17 and ½ years in federal prison</i>	PPP	\$1.1M
Louis Thornton, III	Wire fraud <i>Sentence Imposed: 42 months in federal prison</i>	EIDL/PPP	\$815k
Kary Stevenson Corey Quinn	Conspiracy to commit access device fraud and aggravated identity theft <i>Sentence Imposed: 5 years, 10 months in federal prison (Stevenson)</i> <i>Sentence Imposed: 7 years in federal prison (Quinn)</i>	UI	\$1M
Bridgitte Keim	Bank fraud <i>Sentence Imposed: 2 years in federal prison</i>	PPP	\$588k
Wayne Ganaway	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud	EIDL	\$300k

***Sentence Imposed: 4
years in federal prison***

Eriaius Bentley	Racketeering conspiracy, aggravated identity theft, access device fraud <i>Sentence Imposed: One year in federal prison</i>	UI	\$3M
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Rolanda Wingfield	Access device fraud, aggravated identity theft <i>Sentenced Imposed: 3 years in federal prison</i>	UI	\$135k
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Tywon Spann	Racketeering conspiracy, aggravated identity theft, access device fraud <i>Sentence Imposed: 6 years and 9 months in federal prison</i>	UI	\$3M
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Randy Jones	Wire fraud, aggravated identity theft <i>Sentence Imposed: 5 years and 1 month in federal prison</i>	EIDL/UI	\$250k
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Julio Lugo	Conspiracy to commit money laundering <i>Sentence Imposed: 7 years and 6 months in federal prison</i>	EIDL/PPP	\$4.4M
Keith Nicoletta	Conspiracy to commit money laundering <i>Sentence Imposed: 24 months in federal prison</i>	PPP	\$1.9M
Rosenide Venant	Conspiracy to commit money laundering <i>Sentence Imposed: 5 years in federal prison</i>	EIDL/PPP	\$413k
Melinda Hernandez	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud, wire fraud and aggravated identity theft <i>Sentence imposed: Three years and six months in federal prison</i>	UI	\$1.5M
Bri'antina Mills	Wire fraud and theft of government funds	EIDL	\$10K

	<i>Sentence imposed: 15 months in federal prison</i>		
	Wire fraud		
Jorge Gutierrez Echeverria	<i>Sentence imposed: Two years and six months in federal prison</i>	EIDL	\$150k
	Wire fraud		
Omar Esquivel Bello	<i>Sentence imposed: 15 months in federal prison</i>	EIDL	\$242k
	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud, wire fraud, aggravated identity theft		
Steve Moodie	<i>Sentence imposed: 5 years and 10 months in federal prison</i>	UI	\$1.5M
	Conspiracy to commit money laundering		
Richard Simpkins	<i>Sentence imposed: 5 years and 10 months in federal prison</i>	PPP	\$1.9M

Devaris McClain	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud, access device fraud <i>Sentence imposed: 5 years and 1 month in federal prison</i>	UI	\$85K
Jalissa McDuffy	Wire fraud <i>Sentence imposed: 3 years supervised release with 6 months home detention</i>	PPP	\$41k

These COVID Fraud cases from the Tampa Division were handled by AUSAs Rachel Jones, Greg Pizzo, Tiffany Fields, Diego Novaes, Jennifer Peresie, and SAUSA Chris Poor

Orlando Division

Daniel Johnson	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud, aggravated identity theft, unlawful transfer of firearm <i>Sentence Imposed: 7 years, 6 months in federal prison</i>	UI	\$2.3M
Jacquavius Smith	Possession of short-barreled rifle; felon in possession of firearm; and aggravated identity theft	PPP	\$10k

	<i>Sentence Imposed: 7 years, 1 month in federal prison</i>		
Johnson Eustache	Wire fraud <i>Sentence Imposed: 5 years in federal prison</i>	EIDL/PPP	\$2.2M
Joseph Harrison	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud <i>Sentence Imposed: 12 months in federal prison</i>	UI	\$2.1M
Tomas Ziupsnys	Conspiracy to commit bank fraud; bank fraud; aggravated identity theft <i>Sentence Imposed: 5 years in federal prison</i>	PPP	\$2M
Holly Urban	Conspiracy to commit bank fraud <i>Sentence Imposed: 30 months in federal prison</i>	PPP	\$1.5M
Joel Greenberg	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud and other offenses while on pretrial release	EIDL	\$430k

***Sentence Imposed: 11
years in federal prison***

Don Cisternino	Wire fraud, illegal monetary transactions, and aggravated identity theft <i>Sentence Imposed: 8 years and 6 months in federal prison</i>	PPP	\$7.2M
Keith Ingersoll	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud, wire fraud, aggravated identity theft <i>Sentence imposed: 9 years, 1 month in federal prison.</i>	EIDL	\$66k
Jaheim Davis	Access device fraud and aggravated identity theft <i>Sentence imposed: 3 years, 6 months in federal prison.</i>	UI	\$219k
Teresa McIntyre	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud and other offenses <i>Sentence Imposed: 5 years' probation</i>	EIDL	\$730k

Brian Blake	Possession of device-making equipment, access device fraud, aggravated identity theft <i>Sentence Imposed: 9 years and 8 months in federal prison</i>	PPP/UI	\$832k
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These COVID Fraud cases from the Orlando Division were handled by AUSAs John Gardella, Amanda Daniels, Chauncey Bratt, Emily Chang, Shannon Laurie, and Jennifer Harrington, and U.S. Attorney Roger Handberg

Jacksonville Division

Jacob Byrd	Wire fraud <i>Sentence Imposed: 5 years' probation</i>	PPP	\$10k
Deonna Burke	Wire fraud <i>Sentence Imposed: 5 years' probation</i>	PPP	\$20k
Desmond Williams	Wire fraud conspiracy, wire fraud <i>Sentenced Imposed: 5 years' probation</i>	PPP	\$40k
Kenneth Landers	Wire fraud and illegal monetary transaction	PPP	\$1.4M

	<i>Sentence Imposed: 1 year in federal prison followed by 1 year of supervised release</i>		
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These COVID Fraud cases from the Jacksonville Division were handled by AUSAs Kevin Frein and Michael Coolican

Fort Myers Division

Casey Crowther	Bank fraud, false statement to a financial institution, illegal monetary transaction	PPP	\$2.7M
	<i>Sentence Imposed: 3 years, 1 month in federal prison</i>		

Anthony Bruey Amber Bruey	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud, wire fraud, conspiracy to commit money laundering, illegal monetary transactions <i>Sentence Imposed:</i> <i>Anthony Bruey: 4 years, 3 months in federal prison</i> <i>Amber Bruey: 4 years in federal prison</i>	PPP/EIDL	\$881k
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Edrica Leann Watson	False statement to a lending institution <i>Sentence Imposed: 15 months in federal prison</i>	PPP	\$392k
Daniel Joseph Tisone	Wire fraud, bank fraud, money laundering, aggravated identity theft, possession of ammunition by a prohibited person <i>Sentence Imposed: 7 years in federal prison</i>	PPP/EIDL/MSLP	\$10.7M
Liliana Gonzalez	Wire fraud <i>Sentence Imposed: 5 years of probation with 18 months of home confinement</i>	PPP	\$169k
Al Clint LaRoche	Bank fraud <i>Sentence Imposed: Two years in federal prison</i>	PPP	\$1M
Denis Casseus	Bank fraud and illegal monetary transaction <i>Sentence Imposed: 2 years in federal prison</i>	PPP	\$298k

*followed by 3 years
supervised release*

Ismaelle Manuel	Bank fraud <i>Sentence Imposed: Credit for time served followed by 5 years supervised release</i>	PPP	\$280k
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These COVID Fraud cases from the Fort Myers Division were handled by AUSAs Trent Reichling, Michael Leeman, Jesus Casas, and Yolande Viacava

Ocala Division

Lavelle Harris	Wire fraud <i>Sentence Imposed: Two years and three months in federal prison</i>	PPP	\$1.2M
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This COVID Fraud case from the Ocala Division was handled by AUSA Hannah Nowalk

Types of Fraud*

Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL)

Paycheck Protection Program (PPP)

Unemployment Insurance (UI)

Main Street Lending Program (MSLP)

Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP)

Health Care Fraud (HCF)

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Topics

CORONAVIRUS

DISASTER FRAUD

FINANCIAL FRAUD

Component

[USAO - Florida, Middle](#)