

PRESS RELEASE

# Four Individuals Convicted in Wide-Ranging, Multi-Million Dollar Fraud Scheme

Tuesday, April 30, 2024

## For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Rhode Island

PROVIDENCE, RI – Four Florida residents have been convicted in federal court in Providence, Rhode Island, for their individual roles in a wide-ranging conspiracy to use stolen personal identifying information (PII) of unsuspecting individuals to fraudulently obtain more than \$4.8 million by defrauding banks and fraudulently obtaining benefits and payments from federal and state agencies in multiple jurisdictions, announced United States Attorney Zachary A. Cunha and Rhode Island Attorney General Peter F. Neronha.

In pleading guilty, the four men admitted to a federal judge that they participated in a conspiracy that used stolen PII to obtain debit and credit cards, and to open bank accounts that were used to receive, deposit, and transfer fraudulently obtained government benefits and payments; to submit fraudulent applications to multiple state unemployment agencies, including the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training, for pandemic-related benefits made available under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the Families First Coronavirus Response Act; and to submit fraudulent applications in the names of other persons to federal and state agencies to obtain tax refunds, stimulus payments, and disaster relief funds.

Appearing today in U.S. District Court in Rhode Island, James Legerme, 33, of Sunrise, FL, and Allen Bien-Aime, 33, of Lehigh Acres, FL, each pleaded guilty to charges of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and aggravated identity theft; Junior Mertile, 35, of Miramar, FL, and Tony Mertile, 33, of Miramar, FL, each pleaded guilty on April 12, 2024, to charges of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and aggravated identity theft;

Junior Mertile and Tony Mertile are scheduled to be sentenced on August 26, 2024; James Legerme and Allen Bien-Aime are scheduled to be sentenced on August 27, 2024.

The defendants' sentences will be determined by a federal district judge after consideration of the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

According to plea agreements filed with the court, the defendants have each agreed, and the government will move, to forfeit \$1,214,294.75 in funds that constitute proceeds of the conspiracy. The defendants have also agreed to forfeit hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of Rolex watches and assorted jewelry, and over \$1.1 million dollar in cash seized from the residences of Tony Mertile, Junior Mertile, and James Legerme at the time of their arrests, all of which is attributable to the fruits of the defendants' criminal conduct. Each defendant also agrees that, separate from the money and items to be forfeited, each is jointly and several liable for \$4,857,191 in restitution to be paid to agencies and financial intuitions that were defrauded.

The case is being prosecuted in U.S. District Court by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Denise M. Barton and Stacey A. Erickson and Rhode Island Assistant Attorney General John M. Moreira, chief of the Rhode Island Attorney General's Public Integrity Unit.

The investigation was conducted by the United States Attorney's Office, Rhode Island Department of the Attorney General, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Rhode Island State Police, Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigations, and the Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General, with substantial assistance from the United States Postal Inspection Service, United States Secret Service, and United States Social Security Administration, Office of Inspector General/Office of Investigations.

United States Attorney Cunha, Rhode Island Attorney General Neronha, and FBI Boston Division Special Agent in Charge Jodi Cohen thank the Miami Division of the FBI, the Fort Myers Resident Agency of the FBI Tampa Division, the FBI's Complex Financial Crimes Unit, and the U.S. Marshal Service in Florida for their assistance at the time the defendants were arrested and detained in Florida.

United States Attorney Cunha also extends his gratitude to the United States Attorneys and to prosecutors in the Middle District of Florida and the Southern District of Florida for their assistance.

Rhode Islanders who believe their personal identification has been stolen and used to fraudulently obtain unemployment benefits from the RIDLT are urged to contact the Rhode Island State Police at [financialcrimes@risp.gov](mailto:financialcrimes@risp.gov) or the FBI Providence office at (401) 272-8310.

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*Updated April 30, 2024*

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Press Release Number: 24-46