

PRESS RELEASE

Hyde Park Man Pleads Guilty to COVID-Relief and Federal Assistance Benefit Fraud

Tuesday, February 28, 2023

For Immediate Release

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

BOSTON – A Hyde Park man pleaded guilty yesterday in federal court in Boston to using a stolen identity to fraudulently obtain pandemic relief funds and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, previously known as Food Stamps.

Fernando Mateo Valenzuela, 69, pleaded guilty to three counts of mail fraud, two counts of aggravated identity theft and two counts of misrepresentation of a Social Security number. U.S. District Court Judge Leo T. Sorokin scheduled sentencing for May, 24 2023. Valenzuela was charged by criminal complaint in June 2022 and subsequently indicted by a federal grand jury in August 2022.

Valenzuela used the identity of a United States citizen to apply for and receive \$29,051 in Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) benefits, made available under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Valenzuela also used the identity to apply for and receive \$7,230 in SNAP benefits.

The charges of mail fraud each provide for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, three of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000. The charges of aggravated identity theft each provide for a mandatory minimum sentence of two years in prison, one of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000. The charges of misrepresentation of a Social Security number each provide for a sentence of up to five years in prison, up to three of supervised release and a fine of up to \$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; Bethanne M. Dinkins, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigation, Northeast Region; Matthew B. Millhollin, Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations in New England; Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General; Phillip M. Coyne,

Special Agent in Charge for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General; Ketty Larco-Ward, Postal Inspector in Charge of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Boston Division; and John E. Mawn Jr., Interim Colonel of the Massachusetts State Police made the announcement. Valuable assistance was provided by the Social Security Administration, Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations, Boston Field Division; United States Marshals Service; U.S. Department of State, Diplomatic Security Service; and the Boston Police Department. Assistant U.S. Attorney David Tobin of Rollins' Major Crimes Unit is prosecuting the case.

The investigation was conducted by Homeland Security Investigation's Document and Benefit Fraud Task Force (DBFTF), a specialized investigative group comprising personnel from various state, local, 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>.

Updated February 28, 2023

Topics

CORONAVIRUS

Component

[USAO - Massachusetts](#)