

PRESS RELEASE

Dudley Man Sentenced to Prison for Theft and Misuse of COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance

Wednesday, August 2, 2023

For Immediate Release

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

BOSTON – A Dudley man was sentenced today in federal court in Boston for his involvement in a fraudulent scheme to obtain and misuse COVID-19-related unemployment assistance.

Norman Higgs, 35, was sentenced by U.S. District Court Judge Patti B. Saris to one year in prison and one year of supervised release. Higgs was also ordered to pay \$353,551 in forfeiture. In September 2021, Higgs pleaded guilty to one count of wire fraud conspiracy.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) created a temporary federal unemployment insurance program called Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA). PUA, administered by the Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance, provides unemployment insurance benefits for individuals who are not eligible for other types of unemployment benefits (e.g., the self-employed, independent contractors or gig economy workers).

From April to June 2020, Higgs conspired with Dquintz Alexander to submit fraudulent PUA claims using stolen identifying information of other individuals. The PUA payments were directed into bank accounts controlled by Higgs and Alexander. In total, accounts controlled by Higgs received over \$353,551 in fraudulent PUA payments. While the majority of the funds were frozen by Higgs' banks or recovered through the efforts of law enforcement, Higgs and Alexander were able to use a portion of the funds for their personal benefit, including to pay off credit card debt and to fund digital currency and online retail brokerage accounts.

On [April 28, 2023](#), Alexander pleaded guilty to five counts of wire fraud, one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft. He is scheduled to be sentenced on Aug. 10, 2023.

Acting United States Attorney Joshua S. Levy; Christopher DiMenna, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Boston Division; and Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent in Charge of Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations-Labor Racketeering and Fraud made the announcement. Assistant U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Markham of the Securities, Financial & Cyber Fraud Unit prosecuted the case.

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>.

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