

PRESS RELEASE

Social Media Influencer Sentenced to Five Years in Prison for \$1.5 Million COVID-19 Relief Fraud Scheme

Thursday, September 7, 2023

For Immediate Release

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

BOSTON – A Miami woman was sentenced today in federal court in Boston for fraudulently obtaining over \$1 million in pandemic-related loans using the stolen identities of more than 10 individuals and then using those funds for personal expenses, including chartering a private jet and renting a luxury apartment.

Danielle Miller, 32, was sentenced by U.S. District Court Chief Judge F. Dennis Saylor IV to five years in prison and three years of supervised release. Miller was also ordered to pay restitution in an amount that will be determined at a later date. In March 2023, Miller pleaded guilty to three counts of wire fraud and two counts of aggravated identity theft.

“Ms. Miller isn’t an influencer, she is a convicted felon. She stole the identities of innocent people to steal over \$1.2 million in pandemic-relief loans that should have gone to people in need. In a quest for fleeting social media stardom, Ms. Miller relied on fraud to fund a lavish lifestyle of private jets, luxury apartments and other accoutrements of wealth. Today's sentencing should make it crystal clear that curating a high-society social media presence on the backs of hardworking taxpayers is a path to prison, not fleeting fame,” said Acting United States Attorney Joshua S. Levy.

“Danielle Miller stole critical financial support from the hands of people who needed it during one of the most turbulent economic periods in recent history. While other Americans worried about how to keep food on the table, Miller spent her ill-gotten gains on hotels and luxury goods, heartlessly flaunting this fraudulent lifestyle on social media. Today’s sentence is the result of a collaborative team of investigators committed

to uncovering fraud and ensuring taxpayer dollars are going where they should and not into the hands of scammers like Miller,” said Michael J. Krol, Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations in New England.

“Danielle Miller engaged in a scheme targeted at the Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance, as well as five other state workforce agencies, to fraudulently obtain pandemic-related unemployment benefits in the names of identity theft victims. Miller also utilized stolen identities to fraudulently apply for Economic Injury Disaster Loans. Miller’s schemes sought to secure more than \$1 million in stolen benefits set aside by the federal government to assist Americans struggling with the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to safeguard these critical benefit programs for those who need it,” said Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent-in-Charge, Northeast Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General.

From in or around July 2020 through May 2021, Miller devised and executed a scheme to fraudulently obtain pandemic-related relief loans funded by the federal government – including Economic Injury Disaster Loan funds through the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) as well as Pandemic Unemployment Assistance and related unemployment benefits. To execute the scheme, Miller used the personal identifying information of more than 10 individuals and used fake business names to apply for and receive more than \$1 million in government benefits.

Additionally, Miller possessed counterfeit driver’s licenses in the victims’ names but bearing Miller’s photograph. In August 2020, Miller used a counterfeit driver’s license in the name of a Massachusetts victim to arrange a Gulfstream private jet charter flight from Florida to California, where she stayed at a luxury hotel under the same victim’s name. In a separate instance, Miller used the identity of another victim to rent a luxury apartment in Florida.

Miller maintained an active social media presence via her Instagram account, which had more than 34,000 followers. There, Miller posted her extravagant use of the fraud proceeds and stolen identities, publicizing her purchasing of luxury goods and renting of luxury accommodations. Posts to this account included a post showing Miller at luxury hotels in California where transactions were made using the bank account in one of the victim’s names.

Acting U.S. Attorney Levy; HSI Acting SAC Krol; DOL-OIG SAC Mellone; Amaleka McCall-Brathwaite, Special Agent in Charge of the Small Business Administration Office of Inspector General (SBA-OIG), Eastern Region; and Abington (Mass.) Police Chief David DelPapa made the announcement today. Valuable assistance was provided by

Homeland Security Investigations in Miami and the Massachusetts State Police. Assistant U.S. Attorneys William F. Abely, Chief of the Criminal Division and Benjamin A. Saltzman of the Securities Financial & Cyber Fraud Unit prosecuted 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>.

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