

Southern District prosecutes nearly \$11 million in COVID fraud as part of national enforcement actions

Tuesday, September 5, 2023

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of Georgia

Defendants defrauded small-business relief programs

SAVANNAH, GA: As part of a coordinated nationwide effort to fight COVID-19 fraud, the Southern District of Georgia has taken action against individuals who illegally obtained nearly \$11 million in funds intended to help struggling small businesses during the global pandemic.

As announced by U.S. Attorney Jill E. Steinberg, and in conjunction with the Justice Department's nationwide effort, the Southern District of Georgia conducted more than 20 enforcement actions from May through July 2023, involving a total of \$10.9 million in alleged COVID-19 relief fraud.

"Funding through the 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided more than more than \$650 billion to assist small businesses navigating the financial challenges of the pandemic," said U.S. Attorney Steinberg. "Unfortunately, fraudsters tapped into this program for their own profit, and this nationwide effort seeks to hold them accountable for their widespread fraud."

The CARES act provided small business assistance primarily with grants and forgivable loans available through the Paycheck Protection Plan (PPP) or Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL). The Southern District of Georgia U.S. Attorney's Office, working with its law enforcement partners, conducted multiple enforcement actions during the May-June period including:

- **Kamario Thomas**, 42, of Augusta, Ga., was sentenced to 38 months in prison for Conspiracy to Commit Wire Fraud and Money Laundering. Thomas submitted more than 60 fraudulent loan applications for pandemic relief and received

hundreds of thousands of dollars in kickbacks for his fraud. Thomas was ordered to pay full restitution in the amount of \$4,546,945.

- **Bernard Okojie**, 41, of McDonough, Ga., was convicted of Conspiracy to Commit Wire Fraud and Money Laundering after a three-day jury trial. As detailed during trial, Okojie used information for non-existent companies to file more than 20 fraudulent loan applications for pandemic relief aid, causing losses in excess of \$3.5 million. He awaits sentencing.
- **Jacqueline Somesso**, 55, of Savannah, was sentenced to 18 months in prison for Bank Fraud and Misprision of a felony. Somesso submitted a fake pandemic relief loan application resulting in losses of \$570,736.87. She was ordered to pay restitution in this amount and to forfeit a money judgment in that amount. The Court also entered a consent order forfeiting her interest in a certificate of deposit of \$350,236.54 and a bank account of \$3,520.91, both containing fraud money seized from her during the investigation.
- **Kyle Waldron**, 58, of Douglas, Ga., received service of a civil forfeiture complaint arising from his filing of numerous fraudulent loans applications for pandemic relief aid. The complaint seeks forfeiture of \$326,461.33, the amount of fraud money seized from his bank account.
- A civil forfeiture complaint was filed and continues to be litigated concerning an Atlanta condominium on Peachtree Road Northwest. This property, valued at \$328,000, was purchased with money obtained fraudulently through pandemic relief loans.

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](tel:866-720-5721) or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

These cases were investigated by the Department of the Army Criminal Investigation Division, Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigations, the U.S. Secret Service, the U.S. Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration, the Small Business Administration Office of Inspector General, the FBI, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, and the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General.

The enforcement actions were prosecuted for the United States by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Matthew A. Josephson, Jennifer A. Stanley, Ryan C. Grover, Lindsay Berman-Hansell, J. Bishop Ravenel, Alex Hamner, Marcella Mateo, David H. Estes, and Senior Litigation Counsel Jennifer G. Solari.

Contact

Barry L. Paschal, Public Affairs Officer: 912-652-4422

Updated September 5, 2023

Topics

CORONAVIRUS

DISASTER FRAUD

Components

[Federal Bureau of Investigation \(FBI\)](#)

[USAO - Georgia, Southern](#)

Press Release Number: 67-23