

PRESS RELEASE

Boston Man Sentenced for Identity Theft and Unemployment Fraud Related to COVID-19 Pandemic

Wednesday, January 11, 2023

For Immediate Release

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

BOSTON – A Boston man was sentenced today for using others' identities to fraudulently obtain over \$65,000 in Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) benefits.

Wilson Radhames Peguero Brea, 53, was sentenced by U.S. District Court Chief Judge F. Dennis Saylor IV to 28 months in prison and one year of supervised release. In October 2022, Peguero pleaded guilty to one count of wire fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft.

Peguero used the name and Social Security number of two U.S. citizens to fraudulently apply for and obtain PUA benefits. Peguero also applied for and received additional PUA benefits using his own name but fraudulently representing that he was a U.S. citizen. With respect to the applications, Peguero also submitted fraudulent documents, such as a fake U.S. permanent resident card and a fraudulently obtained driver's license.

United States Attorney Rachael S. Rollins and Matthew B. Millhollin, Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations in New England made the announcement. Valuable assistance was provided by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General; U.S. Department of State, Diplomatic Security Service; U.S. Postal Inspection Service; Massachusetts State Police; and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services in Boston. Assistant U.S. Attorney Benjamin A. Saltzman of Rollins' 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,

detering, 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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