

PRESS RELEASE

Utah Restaurant Owner Sentenced to Federal Prison for COVID Fraud

Thursday, August 15, 2024

For Immediate Release

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

Popular Italian-restaurant owner stole \$1.88M in COVID relief funds

Salt Lake City, Utah – A Utah restaurant owner who obtained over \$1.88 million by defrauding the COVID-19 Relief program was sentenced today to 12 months' and one day imprisonment.

Giuseppe Mirenda, 29, of Salt Lake City, Utah, was sentenced by U.S. District Court Judge Howard C. Nelson, Jr. after pleading guilty in February 2024 to two counts of conversion of government property. In addition to his term of imprisonment, Mirenda was sentenced to three years' supervised release, and a fine of \$250,000.

According to court documents and statements made at the change of plea hearing, Mirenda, a co-owner of five Utah restaurants and Sicilia Restaurant Management, fraudulently applied for and signed agreements for six Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL loans) between March 2020 and June 2020. In 2021, Mirenda also applied for another \$520,000 in EIDL loans, but those loans were denied. Under the CARES Act, EIDL loans were for small businesses struggling from the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the EIDL loan applications, Mirenda represented and agreed that the loan proceeds would be used solely as working capital to alleviate economic injury caused by the pandemic, when in fact he used the loan money for his own personal benefit. Mirenda also misrepresented the citizenship status of his co-owners to improperly obtain the loans.

In total, Mirenda unlawfully obtained \$1,889,400 in EIDL loan funds. In less than a year, he used over \$1.1 million of the fraudulently obtained funds to buy a house in West Jordan, Utah and Las Vegas, Nevada. Mirenda also misused at least another \$81,781 in EIDL loan funds to buy luxury cars, including a BMW M3 and a Jaguar F-PACE, and \$39,000 in cryptocurrency.

Mirenda repaid about \$680,000 of the EIDL funds. The United States also recovered approximately \$1,251,469.29 from the seizure of the profits made from the forced sale of the two homes in Utah and Nevada.

United States Attorney Trina A. Higgins for the District of Utah made the announcement.

The Utah Federal COVID-19 Fraud Strike Force is investigating the case, which includes Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Office of Inspector General's U.S. Small Business Administration – Office of Inspector General (SBA-OIG), Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG), and the U.S. Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA). The public is encouraged to share information about the abuse of the Paycheck Protection Program or other SBA programs by submitting a complaint [here](#).

Assistant United States Attorney Todd C. Bouton of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Utah 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 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> and <https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus/combatingfraud>.

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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