Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Central District of California

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San Gabriel Valley Man Pleads Guilty to Mail Fraud Charge for Fraudulently Obtaining Over $500,000 in COVID-19 Jobless Relief

LOS ANGELES – A San Dimas man pleaded guilty today to a federal criminal charge that he fraudulently obtained more than $500,000 in COVID-19-related unemployment benefits in the names of foreign nationals he falsely claimed were local real estate agents hit hard financially by the pandemic.

Bonifacio Jastilana Marinas, 50, pleaded guilty to a single-count criminal information charging him with mail fraud.

According to his plea agreement, from April 2020 to August 2020, Marinas took advantage of provisions in the CARES Act to file approximately 85 unemployment insurance claims with the California Employment Development Department (EDD) that falsely asserted that the named claimants were self-employed real estate agents in Los Angeles County whose jobs had been adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Marinas often listed his own real estate business – Vintage Realty & Finance Inc., located in West Covina – as the purported workplace of the named claimants.

In actuality, the named claimants resided in Saipan or the Philippines, were not registered as real estate agents in Los Angeles County, had no employment history in California, and were not eligible for the benefits Marinas claimed.

Marinas listed his own residence as the mailing address for each of the named claimants, the plea agreement states. As a result, the debit cards used to distribute the unemployment benefits were mailed to Marinas, who then used them to withdraw the fraudulently obtained funds. In his plea agreement, Marinas admitted that his scheme caused losses to EDD and the United States Treasury of at least $516,244.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed by Congress and signed into law in March 2020, helped provide unemployment insurance benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic to people who did not otherwise qualify, including business owners, self-employed workers, independent contractors, and those with a limited work history.

United States District Judge Fernando M. Olguin has scheduled a June 24 sentencing hearing, at which time Marinas will face a statutory maximum sentence of 20 years in federal prison.

This matter was investigated by the Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, IRS Criminal Investigation; the United States Postal Inspection Service, and the United States Secret Service. EDD Investigations provided substantial assistance.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Ranee A. Katzenstein, Chief of the Major Frauds Section.