PRESS RELEASE

District of Massachusetts Joins DOJ Fraud Division, SBA and SBA-OIG in Nationwide COVID-Era Fraud Enforcement Surge

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For Immediate Release

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

Nationwide enforcement surge targeted more than 160 defendants and approximately $245 million in intended losses to American taxpayers

BOSTON – The U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Massachusetts announced recent charges, convictions and sentencings in five cases involving fraud against COVID-19 pandemic relief programs as part of a nationwide enforcement surge led by the Justice Department’s National Fraud Enforcement Division, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and the SBA Office of Inspector General.

From June 12 through Sept. 1, 2026, federal prosecutors across the country facilitated fraud enforcement actions involving more than 160 criminal defendants, including approximately 80 newly charged defendants and approximately $245 million in intended losses to American taxpayers.

The District of Massachusetts participated in the coordinated effort through prosecutions involving alleged identity theft to obtain pandemic benefits, fraudulent Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) applications, and the diversion of taxpayer-funded relief money for personal expenses.

“Pandemic relief programs were created to keep businesses afloat and help Americans weather an unprecedented crisis – not to finance homes, luxury vehicles or other personal expenses,” said United States Attorney Leah B. Foley. “Years after these programs ended, we are still identifying and prosecuting those who allegedly exploited them. The message should be clear: the passage of time will not shield fraudsters from accountability, and we will continue to protect taxpayer dollars and pursue those who stole from programs designed to help people in genuine need.”

Among the District of Massachusetts’ recent pandemic-relief fraud enforcement actions:

David Breen, 54, of Mount Pleasant, S.C., was sentenced in July 2026 to three years probation, with one year to be served on home detention and restitution in the amount of $1,148,368 after previously pleading guilty in March 2026 to theft of government property for misappropriating more than $1.2 million in EIDL funds for personal use. Breen obtained approximately $1.5 million in EIDL funds on behalf of "Fun Zone," an entity through which he operated "Pinz," a bowling alley and entertainment venue in Milford, Mass. Although Breen agreed to use the loan proceeds as working capital for the business, he instead used more than $1.1 million to build a home for himself in South Carolina and to make a down payment on a $111,000 truck.

Tanya Pierre, 29, of Miami, Fla. pleaded guilty in August 2026 to conspiracy to commit wire fraud in connection with a multi-state PPP fraud scheme, as well as a separate conspiracy to commit wire and bank fraud involving fraudulent mortgage and luxury apartment applications. In the PPP scheme, Pierre conspired with others to submit fraudulent loan applications on behalf of borrowers and created fake tax forms to support applications falsely claiming that borrowers operated qualifying businesses. According to court records, Pierre is responsible for approximately $4.8 million in losses resulting from the PPP scheme. Pierre is scheduled to be sentenced on Nov. 19, 2026.

Wilfredo Payano Batista, 39, a Dominican national residing in Worcester, was arrested and charged in July 2026 and subsequently indicted by a federal grand jury in August 2026 in connection with an alleged scheme to use the identity of a U.S. citizen to obtain government benefits, including PPP and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) funds. Batista allegedly obtained a $20,832 PPP loan and more than $48,000 in PUA benefits using the victim's identity. According to the charging documents, Batista collected approximately $17,682 of the PUA benefits for 21 weeks during which he was incarcerated in Massachusetts for drug-dealing convictions. He allegedly later told the Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance, while posing as the victim, that he had already spent the money and could not repay it.

Patrick Nerese, 48, of Randolph, Mass. was indicted by a federal grand jury in July 2026 on bank fraud, money laundering and wire fraud charges in connection with alleged bank fraud and pandemic-relief fraud schemes. Prosecutors allege that Nerese submitted fraudulent EIDL and PPP applications between 2020 and 2022 by falsely representing his business's gross income and, in connection with a PPP application, submitting a fake tax form to substantiate the claimed revenue. While the alleged fraudulent EIDL application was denied, the alleged PPP fraud resulted in approximately $20,833 in actual losses. Nerese is also alleged to have deposited or attempted to deposit approximately 17 stolen and altered checks totaling more than $3.2 million at Massachusetts banks.

Earlier this month, **Wens Mathurin**, 29, of Brockton, Mass. was sentenced to one day in prison (deemed served), three years of supervised release and $312,000 in restitution after previously pleading guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud and conspiracy to engage in unlawful monetary transactions. Mathurin participated in a broader multi-state PPP fraud scheme in which fraudulent loan applications were submitted using fabricated employee and payroll information and false supporting documents. A fraudulent application submitted on behalf of Mathurin's purported warehouse and cargo delivery business resulted in a $313,852 PPP loan. Mathurin subsequently made kickback payments in connection with the fraud.

On March 26, 2026, United States Attorney Leah B. Foley announced the creation of the Benefit & Voter Fraud Team, a district-wide initiative established in response to the rampant fraud being uncovered across Massachusetts. Members of the public are encouraged to report suspected benefit fraud in Massachusetts by calling 1-855-SCAM-MA-1 (855-722-6621).

On April 7, 2026, the Department of Justice announced the creation of the National Fraud Enforcement Division. The Fraud Division is investigating and prosecuting those who commit fraud against the American people. The Department's work to combat fraud supports President Trump's Task Force to Eliminate Fraud, a whole-of-government effort chaired by Vice President J.D. Vance to eliminate fraud, waste, and abuse within Federal benefit programs.

The Massachusetts cases described above were investigated by various federal and state law enforcement partners, including the Small Business Administration Office of Inspector General; Homeland Security Investigations; the Federal Bureau of Investigation; the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation; the U.S. Secret Service; the Social Security Administration, Office of the Inspector General; the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General; and the Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Inspector General.

The details contained in the charging documents are allegations. The charged defendants are presumed to be innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in the court of law.

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