

**Department of Justice**

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of Massachusetts

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, May 4, 2021

**Dudley Man Arrested for Theft and Misuse of COVID-19  
Pandemic Assistance**

BOSTON – A Dudley man was arrested today in connection with his alleged involvement in a scheme to fraudulently obtain and misuse COVID-19-related unemployment assistance.

Norman Higgs, 34, was charged in a criminal complaint with bank fraud, conspiracy to commit wire fraud, theft of government property and money laundering. Higgs made his initial appearance in Boston this afternoon before U.S. District Court Magistrate Judge Judith G. Dein and was released on conditions.

According to the charging documents, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) created a temporary federal unemployment insurance program called Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA). PUA, administered by the Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance, provides unemployment insurance benefits for individuals who are not eligible for other types of unemployment benefits (e.g., the self-employed, independent contractors, or gig economy workers). As alleged in the complaint, from April to June 2020, Higgs obtained over \$300,000 in proceeds from fraudulent PUA claims. When Higgs's bank recalled a portion of those fraudulently-obtained funds, Higgs allegedly paid those recalls using the proceeds from COVID-19-related government loans.

The charge of bank fraud provides for a sentence of up to 30 years in prison, up to five years of supervised release and a fine of \$1 million. The charge of conspiracy to commit wire fraud provides for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, up to three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. The charges of theft of government property and money laundering each provide for a sentence of up to 10 years in prison, up to three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Acting United States Attorney Nathaniel R. Mendell; Joseph R. Bonavolonta, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Boston Division; and Michael Mikulka, Special Agent in Charge of Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations made the announcement. The Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance provided assistance in the investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Markham of Mendell's Securities, Financial & Cyber Fraud Unit is prosecuting the case.

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

**Topic(s):**  
Coronavirus

**Component(s):**  
[USAO - Massachusetts](#)