

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Michigan

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, November 18, 2022

Former State Employee And Three Others Indicted For \$1 Million COVID-19 Fraud Scheme

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN – U.S. Attorney Mark Totten announced today that Adelita Castillo Juarez, age 55, of Kent City, Francisca Adelita Juarez, age 35, of Kent City, Evelyn De-Maya Vanderbilt, formerly known as Kwamaine Dejaun Trice, age 32, of Grand Rapids and Inkster, and Mya Michelle Giordano, formerly known as Mark Anthony Hall, age 42, of Norfolk, Virginia, were indicted by a federal grand jury with various crimes related to a fraudulent scheme to obtain state and federal benefits provided in part in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic. The indictment alleges that the co-defendants stole at least \$1,053,401.

“Corruption is a rot we must eliminate,” said **U.S. Attorney Mark Totten**. “One of my highest priorities is the investigation and prosecution of criminal conduct by public officials. We will identify and prosecute government employees that steal taxpayer dollars. And pandemic fraud, whether committed by public employees or private citizens, will remain a priority for my office.”

The 33-count indictment alleges that between May 2020 and January 2022, the four co-defendants conspired to commit wire fraud, and in fact committed wire fraud, by filing fraudulent unemployment claims in Michigan and elsewhere. The claims involved in the case were allegedly for claimants who were ineligible for benefits, for example because they did not have Michigan income or reside in Michigan. Adelita Juarez was employed as an Unemployment Insurance Examiner by the State of Michigan during the relevant time period, and allegedly processed the claims to ensure they would be paid, including by clearing fraud notices. Her daughter, Francisca Juarez, allegedly received kickbacks in connection with the payment of the fraudulent claims. The remaining co-defendants, Vanderbilt and Giordano, allegedly obtained the personally identifiable information of the claimants, aided in the submission of the claims, and received some or all of the proceeds of the claims. The proceeds of the scheme were allegedly funded in part by the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, Pandemic Unemployment Compensation, and Lost Wages Assistance programs. The indictment alleges that the co-defendants stole at least \$1,053,401.

“An important mission of the Office of Inspector General is to investigate allegations involving unemployment insurance fraud. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to investigate these types of allegations,” stated **Irene Lindow, Special Agent-in-Charge**, Chicago Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General (“DOL-OIG”).

“I’m proud of the continued success our Agency’s investigators have demonstrated in protecting the integrity of Michigan’s unemployment benefits system,” said Michigan Unemployment Insurance Agency (“UIA”) **Director Julia Dale**. “We have zero tolerance for anyone within our Agency or any outside bad actors who try to scam the system designed to help workers who have lost their jobs. Our team won’t rest until those who steal from taxpayers are brought to justice.”

In addition to conspiracy and wire fraud, the defendants are charged with theft of public money. Adelita and Francisca Juarez, and Vanderbilt, are charged with disaster fraud. Adelita Juarez is charged with federal program theft. Vanderbilt and Giordano are charged with several

counts of aggravated identity theft each. Finally, Vanderbilt is separately charged with wire fraud for allegedly defrauding the Paycheck Protection Program and a lender of \$41,666.

The charges in an indictment are merely accusations and are not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty in a court of law. The government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. A conviction for conspiracy to commit wire fraud, or wire fraud, in connection with a declared major disaster or national emergency is subject to a prison term of up to 30 years and a fine of up to \$1,000,000, among other penalties. A conviction for aggravated identity theft carries a mandatory prison term of two years, to be served consecutively to any other sentence imposed.

DOL-OIG, the UIA-Fraud Investigations Unit, the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration, and the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, are investigating the case. Other law enforcement agencies that have provided assistance include the Michigan State Police, Homeland Security Investigations, the U.S. Secret Service, the Kent County Sheriff's Department, the Walker Police Department, and the Norfolk Police Department. Assistant U.S. Attorney Justin M. Presant is prosecuting the matter. The case was assigned to the Honorable Paul L. Maloney, United States District Judge.

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Topic(s):
Public Corruption
Financial Fraud

Component(s):
USAO - Michigan, Western