

PRESS RELEASE

Four Individuals Sentenced in Sophisticated, Wide-Spread Fraud Schemes

Thursday, March 20, 2025

For Immediate Release

District of Rhode Island

The defendants defrauded CARES Act and other programs out of more than \$4.8 million

PROVIDENCE – Four Florida residents convicted in U.S. District Court in Rhode Island for executing one of the largest schemes in the country to defraud Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act programs, including in Rhode Island, have been sentenced to federal prison, announced Acting United States Attorney Sara Miron Bloom.

[Court documents](#) illustrate that the defendants defrauded various federally funded programs of more than \$4.8 million.

Each of the defendants pleaded guilty to charges of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and aggravated identity theft. The schemes involved obtaining and using stolen personal identifying information to submit fraudulent applications to multiple state unemployment agencies, including the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training, and to submit fraudulent Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL) and Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan applications, for pandemic-related benefits made available under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the Families First Coronavirus Response Act.

Additionally, the defendants submitted fraudulent applications in the names of other persons to federal and state agencies to obtain tax refunds, stimulus payments, and disaster relief funds and loans.

The scheme also involved using the stolen personal identifying information to open bank accounts that were used to receive, deposit, and transfer fraudulently obtained

government benefits and payments and to obtain debit cards for the fraudulently opened bank that were used to withdraw the fraudulently obtained funds.

U.S. District Court Judge Mellisa R. DuBose sentenced

- Tony Mertile 33, of Miramar, FL, identified in court documents as the leader of the conspiracy, to a term of 72 months of incarceration to be followed by three years of supervised release;
- Junior Mertile, 35, of Pembroke Pines, FL, to a term of 54 months of incarceration to be followed by three years of supervised release.
- Allen Bien-Aime, 33, of Lehigh Acres, FL, to a term of imprisonment of 48 months to be followed by three years of supervised release;
- James Legerme, 33, of Sunrise, FL, to a term of imprisonment of 48 months of incarceration to be followed by three years of supervised release; and

In accordance with signed plea agreements filed with the court, the government moved to forfeit a total of \$4,857,191 in funds, or \$1,214,294.75 from each defendant, that constitutes proceeds of the conspiracy. The defendants have also forfeited hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of Rolex watches and assorted jewelry, and over \$1.1 million dollar in cash seized from the residences of Tony Mertile, Junior Mertile, and James Legerme at the time of their arrests. Each defendant is also jointly and several liable for \$4,456,927.36 in restitution to be paid to agencies and financial institutions that were defrauded.

The case was jointly prosecuted in U.S. District Court by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Denise M. Barton and Stacey A. Erickson and Special Assistant United States Attorney and Rhode Island Assistant Attorney General John M. Moreira, Chief of the Rhode Island Attorney General's Public Integrity Unit.

The investigation was conducted by the United States Attorney's Office, Rhode Island Department of the Attorney General, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General, Rhode Island State Police, and the Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigations, with substantial assistance from the United States Postal Inspection Service, United States Secret Service, and United States Social Security Administration, Office of Inspector General/Office of Investigations.

Acting United States Attorney Bloom, FBI Boston Division Special Agent in Charge Jodi Cohen, and Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent in Charge of Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General thank the Miami Division of the FBI, the Fort Myers Resident Agency of the FBI Tampa Division, the FBI's Complex Financial Crimes Unit, and the U.S.

Marshal Service in Florida for their assistance at the time the defendants were arrested and detained in Florida.

Acting United States Attorney Bloom also extends her gratitude to prosecutors in the Middle District of Florida and the Southern District of Florida for their assistance.

Rhode Islanders who believe their personal identification has been stolen and used to fraudulently obtain unemployment benefits from the RIDLT are urged to contact the Rhode Island State Police at financialcrimes@risp.gov or the FBI Providence office at (401) 272-8310.

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[government sentencing memos.pdf](#)

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