

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Middle District of Pennsylvania

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, May 5, 2022

Lebanon County Man Sentenced To 10 Months' Imprisonment For Fraudulently Obtaining Pandemic Unemployment Assistance

HARRISBURG – The United States Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Pennsylvania announced that Luis Mercado, age 44, of Lebanon, Pennsylvania, was sentenced yesterday to 10 months' imprisonment by U.S. District Court Judge Sylvia H. Rambo, for fraudulently claiming pandemic unemployment assistance funds. Mercado was also ordered to pay \$37,555 in restitution.

According to United States Attorney John C. Gurganus, Mercado began claiming Pandemic Unemployment Assistance in August 2020 despite being employed with the United States Department of Agriculture as a poultry inspector. Mercado falsely claimed that he was unemployed due to the pandemic or a major disaster, and he received benefits based on this false claim. Mercado reaffirmed his unemployment status on a weekly basis and ultimately received \$37,555 in fraudulently obtained unemployment benefits. Mercado pleaded guilty to a single count of wire fraud based on his course of conduct.

On May 17, 2021, the Attorney General established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with agencies across government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. The Task Force bolsters efforts to investigate and prosecute the most culpable domestic and international criminal actors and assists agencies tasked with administering relief programs to prevent fraud by, among other methods, augmenting and incorporating existing coordination mechanisms, identifying resources and techniques to uncover fraudulent actors and their schemes, and sharing and harnessing information and insights gained from prior enforcement efforts. For more information on the Department's response to the pandemic, please visit <https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus>.

Anyone with information about allegations of attempted fraud involving COVID-19 can report it by calling the Department of Justice's National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

The case was investigated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General and the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General. Assistant U.S. Attorney Paul J. Miovas, Jr. is prosecuting the case.

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Topic(s):
Coronavirus

Component(s):
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