



THE UNITED STATES

Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, November 17, 2021

Tax Preparer Sentenced in COVID-19 Fraud Scheme

A South Florida tax preparer was sentenced today to two years in prison for perpetrating a scheme to fraudulently obtain over 100 COVID-19 relief loans under the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP).

According to court documents, Leonel Rivero, 35, of Miami, owned a tax-preparation business and submitted approximately 118 fraudulent PPP loan applications on behalf of himself and his accomplices. Combined, the 118 loan applications sought more than \$2.3 million in PPP funds. On each loan application, Rivero falsified the applicant's prior-year sole proprietorship income and expenses and submitted fraudulent IRS tax forms. Rivero and his accomplices received approximately \$900,000 in PPP loans as a result of the fraud. As part of his plea agreement, Rivero agreed to forfeit that entire amount.

Assistant Attorney General Kenneth A. Polite Jr. of the Justice Department's Criminal Division; U.S. Attorney Juan Antonio Gonzalez for the Southern District of Florida; Special Agent in Charge Matthew Line of the IRS-Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI) Miami Office; and Special Agent in Charge Amaleka McCall-Brathwaite of the U.S. Small Business Administration, Office of the Inspector General (SBA-OIG) Investigations Division, Eastern Regional Office made the announcement.

The IRS-CI investigated the case with assistance from the SBA-OIG.

Trial Attorney Della Sentilles of the Criminal Division's Fraud Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Christopher Browne of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida prosecuted the case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Nicole Grosnoff handled the asset-forfeiture component of the case.

The Fraud Section leads the Criminal Division's prosecution of fraud schemes that exploit the PPP. Since the inception of the CARES Act, the Fraud Section has prosecuted over 150 defendants in more than 95 criminal cases and has seized over \$75 million in cash proceeds derived from fraudulently obtained PPP funds, as well as numerous real estate properties and luxury items purchased with such proceeds. More information can be found at <https://www.justice.gov/criminal-fraud/ppp-fraud>.

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

Topic(s):

Coronavirus

Disaster Fraud

Component(s):

Criminal Division

Criminal - Criminal Fraud Section

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