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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Southern District of Florida

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, February 25, 2022

Miami-Dade Police Department Employee Pleads Guilty to COVID Relief Fraud

Miami, Florida – Miami-Dade resident Elisa Rivera, 50, pled guilty yesterday before Senior U.S. District Judge Donald L. Graham to a felony Information charging her with conspiracy to commit wire fraud in connection with a scheme to file fraudulent applications to the U.S. Small Business Administration to COVID-19 relief advance grants and low-interest COVID-19 relief loans.

According to the facts admitted at the change of plea, Elisa Rivera, during 2019 and 2020, was employed on a full-time basis by the Miami-Dade Police Department (“MDPD”) as an Administrative Officer. As an MDPD employee, Rivera suffered no loss of salary due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, on July 3, 2020, Rivera authorized a co-conspirator (identified as “Individual 1” in the Information) to electronically submit an EIDL application on her behalf stating that Rivera was the 100% owner of a for-profit business operating under the name “Elisa Rivera.” That application falsely and fraudulently certified that the business named “Elisa Rivera” was established on or about March 1, 2017, and that during the twelve (12) month period prior to January 31, 2020, that business had gross revenues of \$325,446 and twelve (12) employees. In reality, the defendant did not own any business, was not an independent contractor, and had no business gross revenues or employees.

After having Individual 1 submit the fraudulent EIDL application on her behalf, Rivera offered to, and did, submit fraudulent EIDL applications to the SBA on behalf of a limited group of other individuals (referred to as “the Applicants” in the Information) who also did not own small businesses and did not qualify for EIDL relief. These applications contained false representations as to the existence of their small businesses, their gross revenues, and the number of employees each business had. It was the intent of Rivera and the Applicants to obtain for the Applicants the \$10,000 EIDL advances from the SBA, but not to obtain any additional loan amount. As a result of these fraudulent applications, certain Applicants received the \$10,000 advances from SBA. In exchange for submitting these fraudulent EIDL applications to the SBA, Rivera charged Applicants a fee of up to \$1,000 each.

Rivera is scheduled for sentencing on May 3, 2022, at 2:00 p.m. before Judge Graham, where she faces a possible maximum sentence of five years in prison.

Juan Antonio Gonzalez, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida, Special Agent in Charge George L. Piro of the FBI's Miami Field Office, and Special Agent in Charge Amaleka McCall-Brathwaite of the Small Business Administration, Investigations Division (SBA-OIG), made the announcement.

U.S. Attorney Gonzalez commended the investigative efforts of the FBI's Miami Area Corruption Task Force, which includes task force officers from the Miami-Dade Police Department's Professional Compliance Bureau - Criminal Conspiracy Unit, and SBA-OIG in this matter, and thanked the Miami-Dade County Office of Inspector General for their invaluable assistance with this case. This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Edward N. Stamm and the forfeiture matters are being handled by AUSA Gabrielle Charest-Turken.

In March 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security ("CARES") Act was enacted. It was designed to provide emergency financial assistance to the millions of Americans suffering the economic effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Among other sources of relief, the CARES Act authorized and provided funding to the SBA to provide Economic Injury Disaster Loans ("EIDLs") to eligible small businesses, including sole proprietorships and independent contractors, experiencing substantial financial disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic to allow them to meet financial obligations and operating expenses that could otherwise have been met had the disaster not occurred. EIDL applications were submitted directly to the SBA via the SBA's on-line application website, and the applications were processed and the loans funded for qualifying applicants directly by the SBA.

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>.

Related court documents and information may be found on the website of the District Court for the Southern District of Florida at www.flsd.uscourts.gov or at <http://pacer.flsd.uscourts.gov>, under case number 22-cr-20028.

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Topic(s):

Coronavirus
Disaster Fraud
Public Corruption

Component(s):

USAO - Florida, Southern

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