



THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Northern District of Georgia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Atlanta man sentenced for Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) fraud

ATLANTA – Brandon Ridge has been sentenced for obtaining a \$160,000 fraudulent loan from the Paycheck Protection Program (“PPP”), a portion of which he then used to purchase a Range Rover.

“Ridge thought he could unjustly enrich himself by defrauding a program designed to support struggling businesses during an international pandemic,” said U.S. Attorney Kurt R. Erskine. “His sentence should serve as a warning to others that there are serious consequences for engaging in this type of fraud.”

“Ridge’s personal greed affects every tax paying citizen in this country and takes away from government funds intended to provide relief to small business and employees who desperately need it during this pandemic”, said Chris Hacker, Special Agent in Charge of FBI Atlanta. “This sentence serves as a message that the FBI and our federal partners remain vigilant during this pandemic to make sure funds provided by programs like PPP are used as intended.”

“It’s unfortunate that criminals continue to abuse the funds set aside to aid those impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic. IRS-CI will continue to use our financial expertise to identify fraud, trace the funds, and bring the criminals to justice,” said IRS-Criminal Investigation Special Agent in Charge James E. Dorsey. “Hopefully the continued prosecution of individuals seeking to abuse funds intended to help those most impacted by the pandemic, will serve as a deterrent to others.”

According to U.S. Attorney Erskine, the charges and other information presented in court: The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (“CARES”) is a federal law enacted on March 29, 2020. It is designed to provide emergency financial assistance to the millions of Americans who are suffering the economic effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. One source of relief provided by the CARES Act was the authorization of up to \$349 billion in forgivable loans to small businesses for job retention and certain other expenses through the PPP. In April 2020, Congress authorized over \$300 billion in additional PPP funding. Additional funding was authorized by Congress in December 2020.

The PPP allows qualifying small businesses and other organizations to receive loans with a maturity of two years and an interest rate of one percent. PPP loan proceeds must be used by businesses on payroll costs, interest on mortgages, rent, and utilities. The PPP allows the interest and principal to be forgiven if

businesses spend the proceeds on these expenses within eight weeks of receipt and use at least 75 percent of the forgiven amount for payroll.

Ridge submitted two false PPP loan applications for his business, "Barking Rose Solutions," requesting loan amounts totaling \$449,917.50. The applications contained materially false information, including fabricated banking statements that inflated the company's deposits and expenditures to make it appear that the company qualified for PPP relief. One of these loan applications was accepted and the defendant received \$162,467.50 in fraudulent loan proceeds. The defendant then used the proceeds for his own personal benefit, which included purchasing a Range Rover.

Brandon Ridge, 37, of Decatur, Georgia, was sentenced to serve two years of incarceration, to be followed by three years of supervised release, and to forfeit his interest in the Range Rover and over \$100,000 seized from his bank accounts. Ridge previously entered a plea of guilty to bank fraud. As part of his plea agreement, he agreed to forfeit his interest in the Range Rover as well as over \$100,000 seized from his bank accounts.

This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Thomas J. Krepp and Tiffany R. Dillingham prosecuted the case.

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>.

For further information please contact the U.S. Attorney's Public Affairs Office at USAGAN.PressEmails@usdoj.gov or (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is <http://www.justice.gov/usao-ndga>.

Topic(s):

Coronavirus

Financial Fraud

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