



Department of Justice

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District of Massachusetts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 8, 2021

www.justice.gov/usao/ma/news.html

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MALDEN MAN SENTENCED FOR COVID-RELIEF FRAUD AND IDENTITY THEFT

BOSTON – A Malden man was sentenced today in connection with submitting fraudulent applications for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA). The federal PUA program provides unemployment-related benefits to individuals who have been impacted by COVID-19.

Wagner Sozi, 33, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge George A. O’Toole Jr. to 39 months in prison and two years of supervised release. Sozi was also ordered to pay forfeiture and restitution in the approximate amount of \$110,000. On May 13, 2021, Sozi pleaded guilty to two counts of wire fraud, one count of aggravated identity theft and one count of making a false claim.

Sozi engaged in a scheme to use stolen identity information to open accounts, make purchases, rent cars and apply for PUA benefits. Sozi obtained this stolen identity information from various sources, including from a Cambridge realty company that collected the personal identifying information of people who sought to rent local apartments. Sozi lived with an individual who worked for the realty company, and various files belonging to the company were found in the apartment. Numerous identity theft victims tied to Sozi had been clients of the realty company, including at least one person in whose name a fraudulent PUA claim was filed.

Sozi, along with a female accomplice, opened store credit accounts at Massachusetts Staples locations under various fake identities and then used these accounts to purchase more than \$80,000 in Visa gift cards. Sozi and his co-conspirator submitted fraudulent Staples’ store credit account applications using the personal identifying information of more than 60 victims, which Voltaire processed in exchange for \$8,000 in kickbacks. In addition to the use of stolen identity information to open Staples credit accounts, Sozi used such information to purchase a Rolex for more than \$15,000, withdraw \$5,000 cash and rent a Dodge Charger and a Ford Mustang, both of which he failed to return.

On Oct. 26, 2021, Voltaire pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and is scheduled to be sentenced on Feb. 28, 2022.

Acting United States Attorney Nathaniel R. Mendell; Frederick J. Regan, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Secret Service, Boston Field Office; and Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigations, made the announcement today. Valuable assistance in the investigation was provided by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Unemployment Assistance, Program Integrity Unit; the Massachusetts State Police; and the Malden, Medford and Braintree Police Departments. Assistant U.S. Attorney William Abely, Chief of Mendell's Criminal Division 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>.

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