

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Eastern District of Pennsylvania

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, January 14, 2022

Philadelphia Woman Charged With Money Laundering and Stealing Federal Funds in Scheme Directed by Online-Dating Paramour

PHILADELPHIA – United States Attorney Jennifer Arbittier Williams announced that Myrna Ortiz, 43, of Philadelphia, PA, was charged in a 32-count Indictment in connection with a conspiracy to steal and conceal the origin of fraudulently obtained Social Security benefits and COVID-19 PUA unemployment benefits. The Indictment charges Ortiz with one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering and 31 counts of theft of government funds. She made her initial appearance in federal court on these charges earlier today.

According to the Indictment, Ortiz met an individual through the online dating website 'Match.com,' and began a relationship via digital messaging. She is charged with helping her online paramour execute a scheme in which fraudulent claims were filed for Social Security Administration (SSA) Retirement benefits, using the personal identifiable information of individuals age 62 or older, the age at which taxpayers become eligible to begin collecting those benefits. The indictment charges that Ortiz participated by laundering the stolen money. Specifically, she is charged with opening ten bank accounts at the direction of her co-conspirator in order to receive the fraudulently issued government funds, and then withdrawing the funds, purchasing gift cards with the cash, and laundering the funds back to her co-conspirator through the gift cards. The scheme targeted high wage earners who are over the age of 62 but have not yet filed for SSA Retirement benefits on their own, and it impacted at least twenty-three victims.

Further, the Indictment alleges that the defendant helped steal money from the government specifically related to COVID-19 emergency relief funds or Pandemic Unemployment Assistance ("PUA") funds. Using the same bank accounts to which the fraudulently obtained SSA funds were directed, Ortiz is also charged with depositing fraudulently obtained PUA funds in the names of various victims and laundering these illegal proceeds back to the same co-conspirator. This scheme involved deceiving the state workforce agencies of Pennsylvania, Illinois, Indiana, West Virginia, Arizona, and Ohio.

Through these schemes, Ortiz is alleged to have been involved in a conspiracy to defraud the government, and to launder the stolen government funds in an amount of almost \$600,000.

"Social Security retirement benefits and pandemic unemployment assistance funds are intended to help Americans who have worked hard and now need some extra help making ends meet, either because they are now enjoying their well-deserved retirement or because the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically impacted their ability to work and earn a living," said U.S. Attorney Williams. "Thieves who attempt to take these funds are taking advantage of honest workers – ripping them off while also ripping off all taxpayers who fund these programs. As alleged, Ortiz fraudulently obtained nearly \$600,000 in government funds, all at the behest of an individual she met through an online dating website."

“An important part of the mission of the Office of Inspector General is to investigate allegations of fraud related to unemployment insurance programs. We will continue to work with the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry and our law enforcement partners to investigate these types of allegations,” stated Syreeta Scott, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Philadelphia Region, U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General.

The case was investigated by the United States Department of Labor Office of Inspector General and the Social Security Administration Office of Inspector General, and is being prosecuted by Special Assistant United States Attorney Megan Curran.

Topic(s):

Financial Fraud

Component(s):

[USAO - Pennsylvania, Eastern](#)

Contact:

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