

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Northern District of New York

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, July 25, 2022

Queens Man Pleads Guilty to Pandemic-Related Fraud Charges

ALBANY, NEW YORK – Melvin Ansong, age 26, of Corona, New York, pled guilty today to mail fraud, aggravated identity theft and wire fraud in connection with schemes in which he obtained more than \$190,000 in unemployment insurance benefits and government-backed loans meant to provide relief from the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The announcement was made by United States Attorney Carla B. Freedman; Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent in Charge, New York Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General (USDOL-OIG); Matthew Scarpino, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the Buffalo Field Office of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI); and Ketty Larco-Ward, Inspector in Charge of the Boston Division of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS).

In pleading guilty, Ansong admitted that he fraudulently obtained \$165,182 in unemployment insurance benefits from the New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL) in the names of 13 other people and an additional \$18,480 in benefits from the Arizona Department of Economic Security in the name of another individual. Ansong further admitted that he fraudulently obtained an \$8,000 Economic Injury Disaster Loan from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) by claiming that he owned a pet grooming company when in fact no such company existed.

As part of his plea agreement, Ansong agreed to pay restitution in the amounts of \$165,182 to the State of New York, \$18,480 to the State of Arizona, and \$8,000 to the SBA.

The mail and wire fraud convictions each carry a maximum term of 20 years in prison, a fine of up to \$250,000, and a term of supervised release of up to 3 years. The aggravated identity theft conviction carries a mandatory term of 2 years in prison, to be imposed consecutively to any other term of imprisonment. Ansong is scheduled to be sentenced on October 28, 2022 by United States District Judge Mae A. D'Agostino. A defendant's sentence is imposed by a judge based on the particular statute the defendant is charged with violating, the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other factors.

The case was investigated by USDOL-OIG, USPIS, and HSI, with assistance from U.S. Customs and Border Protection's New York Field Office and the NYSDOL's Office of Special Investigations. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Alexander P. Wentworth-Ping and Joshua R. Rosenthal.

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>.

Topic(s):

Coronavirus
Financial Fraud

Component(s):

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