

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of Massachusetts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Malden Man Pleads Guilty to COVID-Relief Fraud and Identity Theft

BOSTON – A Malden man pleaded guilty today to identity fraud charges 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, pleaded guilty to two counts of wire fraud, one count of aggravated identity theft and one count of making a false claim. U.S. District Judge George A. O'Toole Jr. scheduled sentencing for Sept. 22, 2021. Sozi was indicted by a federal grand jury in July 2020.

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 this 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 this realty company, including at least one person in whose name a fraudulent PUA claim was filed.

Sozi, along with a female accomplice, opened credit accounts at an office supply retailer under various fake identities and then used these accounts to purchase Visa gift cards. Sozi used another stolen identity to purchase a Rolex for more than \$15,000. He also possessed a Maine driver's license, bearing his photograph and the name of an identity theft victim, which was used to open a bank account and to make large purchases at an Apple Store.

Following his arrest on June 25, 2020, documents were recovered from Sozi's apartment, including a PUA debit card in another individual's name. Further investigation revealed that the PUA claim associated with the seized debit card listed Sozi's address as the mailing address and that another fraudulent PUA claim had been submitted under Sozi's own name but with another Social Security number.

The charges of wire fraud provide for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000. The charge of aggravated identity theft provides for a mandatory consecutive sentence of two years in prison, up to one year of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000. The false claim charge provides for a sentence of up to three years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Acting United States Attorney Nathaniel R. Mendell; Frederick J. Regan, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Secret Service, Boston Field Office; and Nick Splagounias, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigations made the announcement today. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Unemployment Assistance, Program Integrity Unit, the Massachusetts State Police and the Malden,

Medford and Braintree Police Departments provided valuable assistance with the investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Bill Abely, Chief of Mendell's Major Crimes Unit, is prosecuting the case.

Topic(s):

Coronavirus

Component(s):

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