

**PRESS RELEASE**

# Wayne County Man Charged With Committing \$1.5 Million In Covid-19 Pandemic Fraud

Friday, May 19, 2023

**For Immediate Release**

U.S. Attorney's Office, Middle District of Pennsylvania

SCRANTON - The United States Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Pennsylvania announced today that Christopher J. Miller, age 35, formerly of Newfoundland, Pennsylvania, was charged in an indictment with 54 combined counts of wire fraud, bank fraud false statements, identity theft, and unlawful monetary transactions.

According to United States Attorney Gerard M. Karam, the indictment alleges that Miller owned and operated multiple corporate entities in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, and Florida. Miller allegedly filed, and helped others to file, dozens of fraudulent applications for pandemic stimulus funds, including under the Payment Protection Program (PPP), for Economic Injury and Disaster Loans (EIDLs), and for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) benefits. Miller was charged with 16 counts of wire fraud, two counts of bank fraud, two counts of false loan applications, and 17 count of making false statements to the United States Small Business Administration, for the fraudulent applications. Miller also is charged with one count of aggravated identity theft, for using a stolen identity to file an application.

The applications allegedly submitted by Miller were filed on behalf of corporate entities that did not, in fact, have actual business operations, and that bore false addresses, false IRS-issued Employee Identification Numbers, false dates of business establishment and operation, false employee headcount information, and fabricated gross income, gross receipts and payroll obligation information. The applications also included forged IRS income tax returns, and federal employment tax documents. Miller allegedly failed to disclose in the applications that he was previously convicted of a felony.

Miller and his associates allegedly obtained approximately \$1,500,000 in PPP, EIDL, and PUA funds through filing the fraudulent applications. In addition to the personal funds

that he received, Miller also allegedly received cash kickbacks from other individuals on whose behalf he filed the fraudulent applications. Instead of using the funds on business expenses, Miller allegedly used them to purchase automobiles, vacations, and real estate, among other personal expenses. Miller is charged with 16 counts of making unlawful monetary transactions with the proceeds of his fraud.

The PPP and EIDL programs, both funded by the March 2020 CARES Act, were designed to help small businesses facing financial difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic. PPP funds were offered in forgivable loans, provided that certain criteria are met, including use of the funds for employee payroll, mortgage interest, lease, and utilities expenses. EIDL funds are offered in low-interest rate loans, designated for specific business expenses, such as fixed debts, payroll, and business obligation. The PUA program was created by the CARES Act, as part of the United States government's efforts to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the public's health and economic well-being. The PUA program was designed to provide unemployment benefits to individuals not eligible for regular unemployment compensation or extended unemployment benefits.

The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and by the Department of Labor, Office of the Inspector General. Assistant U.S. Attorney Phillip J. Caraballo is prosecuting the case.

The maximum penalty under federal law for the most serious charges are 30 years of imprisonment, a term of supervised release following imprisonment, and a fine. The aggravated identity theft offense carries a mandatory two-year sentence of imprisonment that is to run consecutive to any other term of imprisonment imposed. A sentence following a finding of guilt is imposed by the Judge after consideration of the applicable federal sentencing statutes and the Federal Sentencing Guidelines.

Indictments are only allegations. All persons charged are presumed to be innocent unless and until found guilty in court.

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