

PRESS RELEASE

Jury Convicts Two Miami Residents for Involvement in Multi-Defendant PPP Scheme

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of Florida

MIAMI – On Nov. 8, a federal jury convicted Lazaro Verdecia Hernandez, 37, and Yadier Rodriguez Arteaga, 41, both of Miami, of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, conspiracy to commit money laundering, and money laundering, in connection with a scheme to obtain fraudulent loans under the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). Verdecia was also convicted of wire fraud.

Verdecia and co-conspirator Heidi Cid submitted over 63 fraudulent PPP loan applications. In the loan paperwork, they made the applicants appear eligible for pandemic relief by falsifying the number of the companies' employees and included forged documents. As a result of the fraudulent submissions, lenders disbursed over 14.5 million dollars to bank accounts controlled by the individuals, who then withdraw the money and gave Verdecia, Cid, and Hernandez their cut. Co-conspirator Cid previously pled guilty for her involvement in the scheme and is pending sentencing.

Verdecia and Arteaga are scheduled to be sentenced on Feb. 3, 2025, before U.S. Senior District Judge Robert N. Scola. Verdecia and Arteaga face up to 20 years in prison on the conspiracy and fraud counts and ten years on the money laundering counts. Verdecia faces up to 20 years in prison on the substantive wire fraud count of conviction. The court will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

U.S. Attorney Markenzy Lapointe for the Southern District of Florida, Special Agent in Charge Rafael Barros for the U. S. Secret Service (USSS), Special Agent in Charge Edwin S. Bonano for the Federal Housing Finance Agency, Office of Inspector General (FHFA OIG), and Special Agent in Charge Amaleka McCall-Brathwaite, U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Inspector General (SBA OIG), Eastern Region, made the announcement.

USSS Miami and FHFA OIG investigated the case with the assistance of SBA OIG. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Thomas Haggerty and Eli Rubin are prosecuting the case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Sarah Klco is handling asset forfeiture.

The following cases were previously charged in relation to the fraud scheme:

- U.S. v. Roberto Lopez, Kenia Carrillo, Lester Hedman Safont, Oreste Ruiz Linares, Honolio Navarro Caballero, Barbara Alvarez, Javier Pico, Alfredo Contrera, and Erisbel Gonzalez Gomez, Case No. 22-cr-20368;
- U.S. v. Nancy Bahos Serna, Case No. 23-cr-20310 (This case is being prosecuted by AUSA Daniel Bernstein.);
- U.S. v. Jorge Trueba Lopez, Case No. 21-cr-20382;
- U.S. v. Nancy Saavedra Torres, Case No. 21-cr-20225;
- U.S. v. Giraldo Caraballo, Case No. 21-cr-20264;
- U.S. v. Felix Martinez and Yailin Perez, Case No. 21-cr-20276;
- U.S. v. Yoliesse Sarmiento Carrion, Case No. 22-cr-20530;
- U.S. v. Osiel Rodriguez Furgel, Case No. 21-cr-20251; and
- U.S. v. Leonardo Gonzalez Lopez, Case No. 23-cr-20113.

Each of the aforementioned defendants pled guilty, except for Javier Pico and Erisbel Gonzalez Gomez who are fugitives.

In March 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act was enacted. It was designed to provide emergency financial assistance to the millions of Americans suffering the economic effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Among other sources of relief, the CARES Act authorized and provided funding to the SBA to provide Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDLs) to eligible small businesses, including sole proprietorships and independent contractors, experiencing substantial financial disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic to allow them to meet financial obligations and operating expenses that could otherwise have been met had the disaster not occurred. EIDL applications were submitted directly to the SBA via the SBA's online application website, and the applications were processed and the loans funded for qualifying applicants directly by the SBA.

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>.

On Sep. 15, 2022, the Attorney General selected the Southern District of Florida's U.S. Attorney's Office to head one of three national COVID-19 Fraud Strike Force Teams. The Department of Justice established the Strike Force to enhance existing efforts to combat and prevent COVID-19 related financial fraud. For more information on the department's response to the pandemic, please click [here](#).

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>.

Related court documents and information may be found on the website of the District Court for the Southern District of Florida at www.flsd.uscourts.gov or at <http://pacer.flsd.uscourts.gov> under case number 23-cr-20421.