

Press Release

Miami Man Sentenced to 15 Years in Prison for Leading Payment Protection Program Fraud Scheme

Tuesday, April 29, 2025

For Immediate Release

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

MIAMI – Lazaro Verdecia Hernandez, 37, of Miami, was sentenced today to 15 years in federal prison for leading a scheme that involved obtaining fraudulent loans under the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and laundering the proceeds.

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 company employees and forging documents. As a result of the fake submissions, lenders disbursed over \$14.5 million to bank accounts controlled by individuals who then withdraw the money and gave Verdecia, Cid, and another co-conspirator, Yadier Rodriguez Arteaga, their cut.

During earlier proceedings, Arteaga and Cid were adjudicated guilty and sentenced to federal prison terms: Arteaga to almost six years and Cid to 26 months.

U.S. Attorney Hayden P. O’Byrne 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 the U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Inspector General (SBA OIG), Eastern Region. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Thomas Haggerty and Eli Rubin prosecuted 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;
- *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 these defendants pled guilty, except for Javier Pico and Erisbel Gonzalez Gomez who are fugitives.

Approximately 22 people were charged and convicted in the conspiracy.

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 on-line 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>.

You may find a copy of this press release (and any updates) on the website of the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida at <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdfl>.

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.

Contact

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