

Pinellas County Man Sentenced for Wire and Bank Fraud Offenses

Monday, July 17, 2023

For Immediate Release
U.S. Attorney's Office, Middle District of Florida

Tampa, Florida – U.S. District Judge Kathryn K. Mizelle has sentenced James John Melis (54, Largo) to four years and three months in federal prison for bank fraud and wire fraud. As part of his sentence, the court entered an order of forfeiture in the amount of \$439,177, the proceeds of the charged criminal conduct. The court also ordered Melis to pay \$684,000 in restitution, which represents the loss amount of the offenses. Melis had pleaded guilty on March 20, 2023.

According to court documents, Melis was involved in two fraud schemes. In the first, Melis abused his position as business manager at a private school in Hillsborough County by fraudulently attaching his personal bank account to one of the school's financial accounts. When parents made tuition payments, Melis initiated fraudulent electronic funds transfers to his personal account. He then spent the stolen funds on travel and luxury items, including jewelry.

In the second scheme, Melis carried out a mortgage origination fraud against a financial institution for two properties that he owned. To deceive the lender into believing that he was a qualified borrower, Melis used the personal identification information of another person on loan applications, and prepared and submitted false and fraudulent IRS income tax returns, fictitious satisfactions of mortgages falsely representing that his properties had equity, and bogus lease agreements falsely showing he received substantial rental income. Based on Melis's misrepresentations, the financial institution approved and funded both mortgage loans. The mortgage loans were purchased and guaranteed by Fannie Mae.

This case was investigated by the Federal Housing Finance Agency – Office of Inspector General and Federal Bureau of Investigation. It was prosecuted by Special Assistant United States Attorney Chris Poor. Assistant United States Attorney James A. Muench is handling the forfeiture.

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