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Six Men Sentenced for Roles in \$20M COVID-19 Relief Fraud Ring

February 12, 2024

Six Texas men were sentenced today for their roles in a conspiracy to fraudulently obtain more than \$20 million in forgivable Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans that the Small Business Administration (SBA) guaranteed under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

Hamza Abbas, 31, Ammas Uddin, 31, and Arham Uddin, 27, all of Richmond, were sentenced to three years and eight months, one year and six months, and one year and six months in prison, respectively; Syed Ali, 55, of Sugar Land, was sentenced to two years in prison; and Muhammad Anis, 55, and Jesus Acosta Perez, 33, both of Houston, were sentenced to one year and nine months and one year and one day in prison, respectively. All six defendants previously pleaded guilty.

According to court documents, the defendants conspired together and with others to fraudulently obtain PPP loans by, among other means, supplying information about their businesses to be used to submit false and fraudulent PPP loan applications. Specifically, the PPP loan applications falsified the numbers of employees and the average monthly payroll expenses of the applicant businesses. The loan applications also included fraudulent bank records and fake federal tax forms in support of the PPP loan applications. Abbas also recruited others into the conspiracy and created fraudulent bank records that were used in support of the loan applications in exchange for kickbacks.

The defendants also laundered a portion of the fraudulent proceeds by writing checks from companies that received PPP loans to fake employees. These fake paychecks were cashed at certain cash checking businesses, including one owned by another co-conspirator.

In January, three other individuals who previously pleaded guilty were sentenced for their roles in the loan fraud scheme. Raheel Malik, 43, of Sugar Land, was sentenced to one year and six months in

prison; Nishant Patel, 41, of Houston, was sentenced to two years in prison; and Harjeet Sing, 50, of Katy, was sentenced to five years of probation.

In October 2023, seven other individuals [were sentenced](#) for their roles in the loan fraud conspiracy, including the ringleader, Amir Aqeel, 55, of Houston, who was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

Acting Assistant Attorney General Nicole M. Argentieri of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney Alamdar S. Hamdani for the Southern District of Texas, Special Agent in Charge Brady Ipock of the SBA Office of Inspector General (SBA-OIG) Central Region, Special Agent in Charge Catherine Huber of the Federal Housing Finance Agency Office of Inspector General’s (FHFA-OIG) Central Region, Special Agent in Charge Mark Dawson of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Houston, Special Agent in Charge Anand Ramlall of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation Office of Inspector General (FDIC-OIG) Dallas Region, and Special Agent in Charge Gary Smith of the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) Gulf States Field Division made the announcement.

The SBA-OIG, FHFA-OIG, HSI, FDIC-OIG, and TIGTA are investigating the cases.

Trial Attorneys Kate McCarthy, Louis Manzo, Spencer Ryan, Della Sentilles, and Randall Warden of the Criminal Division’s Fraud Section and Assistant U.S. Attorneys Rodolfo Ramirez and Kristine Rollinson for the Southern District of Texas are prosecuting the cases.

Anyone with information about allegations of attempted fraud involving COVID-19 can report it by calling the Justice Department’s National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form.

The Fraud Section leads the Criminal Division’s prosecution of fraud schemes that exploit the PPP. Since the inception of the CARES Act, the Fraud Section has prosecuted over 200 defendants in more than 130 criminal cases and has seized over \$78 million in cash proceeds derived from fraudulently obtained PPP funds, as well as numerous real estate properties and luxury items purchased with such proceeds. More information can be found at www.justice.gov/criminal-fraud/ppp-fraud.

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