

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of Massachusetts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, August 4, 2022

Hyde Park Man Indicted for COVID-Relief and Federal Assistance Benefit Fraud

BOSTON – A Hyde Park man has been indicted by a federal grand jury in connection with his alleged use of a stolen identity to fraudulently obtain pandemic relief funds and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, previously known as Food Stamps.

Fernando Mateo Valenzuela, 68, was indicted on three counts of mail fraud, two counts of aggravated identity theft and two counts of misrepresentation of a Social Security number. Valenzuela was previously charged by criminal complaint on June 17, 2022. He has remained in custody since his arrest on June 21, 2022.

According to the indictment, Valenzuela, a citizen of the Dominican Republic, used the identity of a United States citizen to apply for and receive \$29,051 in Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) benefits, made available under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. It is further alleged that Valenzuela also used the identity to apply for and receive \$7,230 in SNAP benefits.

The charges of mail fraud each provide for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, three of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000. The charges of aggravated identity theft each provide for a mandatory minimum sentence of two years in prison, one of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000. The charges of misrepresentation of a Social Security number each provide for a sentence of up to five years in prison, up to three of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and statutes which govern the determination of a sentence in a criminal case.

United States Attorney Rachael S. Rollins; Matthew B. Millhollin, Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations in Boston; Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent in Charge of Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigations; Phillip M. Coyne, Special Agent in Charge for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General; Ketty Larco-Ward, Postal Inspector in Charge of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Boston Division; and Colonel Christopher Mason, Superintendent of the Massachusetts State Police made the announcement. Assistant U.S. Attorney David Tobin of Rollins' Major Crimes Unit is prosecuting the case.

The investigation was conducted by Homeland Security Investigation's Document and Benefit Fraud Task Force (DBFTF), a specialized investigative group comprising personnel from various state, local, and federal agencies with expertise in detecting, deterring, and disrupting organizations and individuals involved in various types of document, identity, and benefit fraud schemes.

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>.

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>.

The details contained in the indictment are allegations. The defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

Topic(s):
Coronavirus
Financial Fraud
Identity Theft

Component(s):
[USAO - Massachusetts](#)