

PRESS RELEASE

Miami-Based Social Media Influencer Pleads Guilty to \$1.5 Million COVID-19 Relief Fraud Scheme

Monday, March 6, 2023

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Massachusetts

Defendant publicized luxurious use of fraud proceeds and stolen identities on Instagram

BOSTON – A Miami woman pleaded guilty today to fraudulently obtaining over \$1 million in pandemic-related loans using the stolen identities of more than 10 individuals, and then using those funds for personal expenses, including chartering a private jet and rental of a luxury apartment.

Danielle Miller, 32, pleaded guilty to three counts of wire fraud and two counts of aggravated identity theft. U.S. District Court Chief Judge F. Dennis Saylor IV scheduled sentencing for June 27, 2023. Miller was arrested on a criminal complaint in May 2021 and subsequently indicted by a federal grand jury in July 2021.

From in or around July 2020 through May 2021, Miller devised and executed a scheme to fraudulently obtain pandemic-related relief loans funded by the federal government – including Economic Injury Disaster Loan funds through the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) as well as Pandemic Unemployment Assistance and related unemployment benefits. To execute the scheme, Miller used the personal identifying information of more than 10 individuals and used fake business names to apply for and receive more than \$1 million in government benefits.

Additionally, Miller possessed counterfeit driver's licenses in the victims' names but bearing Miller's photograph. In August 2020, Miller used a counterfeit driver's license in the name of a Massachusetts victim to arrange a Gulfstream private jet charter flight from Florida to California, where she stayed at a luxury hotel under the same victim's name. In a separate instance, Miller used the identity of another victim to rent a luxury apartment in Florida.

Miller maintained an active social media presence via her Instagram account, which had more than 34,000 followers. There, Miller posted her extravagant use of the fraud proceeds and stolen identities, publicizing her purchasing of luxury goods and renting

of luxury accommodations. Posts to this account included a post showing Miller at luxury hotels in California where transactions were made using the bank account in one of the victim's names.

The charges of wire fraud each provide for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, up to three years of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000. The charges of aggravated identity theft provide for a mandatory sentence of two years in prison to be served consecutively to any other sentenced imposed, one year 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 New England; Amaleka McCall-Brathwaite, Special Agent in Charge of the Small Business Administration Office of Inspector General (SBA-OIG), Eastern Region; Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General; and Abington (Mass.) Police Chief David DePapa made the announcement today. Valuable assistance was provided by Homeland Security Investigations in Miami and the Massachusetts State Police. Assistant U.S. Attorneys William F. Abely, Chief of Rollins' Criminal Division and Benjamin A. Saltzman of Rollins' Criminal Division are prosecuting the case.

The investigation is being conducted by Homeland Security's Investigation's Document and Benefit Fraud Task Force (DBFTF), a specialized field investigative group comprised of personnel from various local, state 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>.

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