

# Mead Man Pleads Guilty to Bank Fraud for Defrauding COVID-19 Relief Programs

Thursday, August 1, 2024

## For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Washington

Spokane, Washington - Vanessa R. Waldref, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Washington, announced today that Antonio Feliciano Crawford, age 54, of Mead Washington, pleaded guilty to one count of Bank Fraud. United States District Judge Thomas O. Rice accepted Crawford's guilty plea and scheduled a sentencing hearing for October 30, 2024, in Spokane, Washington.

On March 27, 2020, the President signed into law the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The CARES Act provided a number of programs through which eligible small businesses could request and obtain relief funding intended to mitigate the economic impacts of the pandemic for small and local businesses. One program, the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) program, offered forgivable loans to eligible small businesses in order to retain or rehire employees who lost their jobs, or were in danger of doing so, due to the pandemic. Another program, the Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program, provided low interest loans that could be deferred until the conclusion of the pandemic to provide "bridge" funding for small businesses to maintain their operations during shutdowns and other economic circumstances caused by the pandemic. The PPP and EIDL programs have provided billions of dollars in aid, the vast majority of which have not been paid back, including hundreds of millions of dollars disbursed within Eastern Washington.

In the plea agreement accepted by the court, and in information disclosed during court proceedings, Crawford, age 54, of Mead, Washington, filed false and fraudulent PPP and EIDL applications during 2020 and 2021 on behalf of four companies purportedly owned and operated by Crawford: Tann LLC, Crawford Entertainment, A&M Personal Training LLC, and a sole proprietorship doing business as "Antonio Crawford." Crawford submitted false and fraudulent information and documentation, including fraudulent and fictitious purported tax returns for the companies, in order to obtain at least \$186,971 in PPP and EIDL funding for which he was not eligible.

U.S. Attorney Waldref highlighted the dedication of prosecutors and investigators that make up the COVID-19 Fraud Strike Force. "This guilty plea is the result of many hours of tireless work by members

of the COVID-19 Fraud Task Force, which is dedicated to the mission of fighting COVID fraud in Eastern Washington. Mr. Crawford repeatedly took advantage of federal programs designed to provide a financial lifeline to small and local businesses during an unprecedented global pandemic. I am grateful for the close law enforcement partnerships we enjoy in the Eastern District of Washington that allow federal prosecutors in my office to target fraudsters and hold them accountable for their actions.”

“Though HSI encounters many different types of crooks and fraudsters, there is something particularly vile about those that would take advantage of crucial government aid programs when they are needed the most,” said Special Agent in Charge Robert Hammer, who oversees HSI operations in the Pacific Northwest. “Our agents will continue to support the law enforcement partnerships that are investigating COVID-19 related fraud, maintaining fairness in the programs that are important to the resiliency of our nation.”

“This case demonstrates our unwavering commitment to protecting the integrity of COVID-19 relief programs,” said SBA OIG’s Western Region Special Agent in Charge Weston King. “Fraudulent activities undermine the purpose of these essential programs, designed to support legitimate small businesses struggling during the pandemic. I want to thank the U.S. Attorney’s Office and our law enforcement partners for remaining vigilant in identifying and pursuing those who exploit federal relief efforts for personal gain.”

In February 2022, U.S. Attorney Waldref and the U.S. Attorney’s Office (USAO) began working with federal law enforcement agencies to create and launch a COVID-19 Fraud Strike Force that would leverage partnerships between different agencies to aggressively investigate and prosecute fraud against COVID-19 relief programs in Eastern Washington. The Strike Force consists of agency representatives from the USAO, Small Business Administration (SBA) Office of Inspector General (OIG), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), U.S. Department of the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA), U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs OIG, General Services Administration OIG, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) OIG, Internal Revenue Service, Department of Energy OIG, and others.

This case was investigated by the HSI Spokane Field Office, TIGTA, SBA OIG, and the Department of Homeland Security OIG. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Dan Fruchter, Jeremy J. Kelley, and Devin C. Curda.

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## **Contact**

Robert Curry

Public Affairs Specialist

USAWAE.Media@usdoj.gov

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