

Mead Man Sentenced to Nearly 4 Years in Federal Prison for Stealing over \$750,000 From COVID Relief Programs

Monday, November 18, 2024

For Immediate Release

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

Spokane, Washington - On November 14, 2024, United States Attorney Vanessa R. Waldref announced that United States District Judge Thomas O. Rice sentenced Antonio Feliciano Crawford, age 55, of Mead, Washington, to 45 months in federal prison on charges of bank fraud. Judge Rice also imposed 5 years of supervised release, restitution of \$203,347.08, and forfeiture of \$173,329.00 in cash seized during a search of Crawford's home, and \$13,642.00 in cash Crawford provided in lieu of forfeiture of his vehicle.

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 has not been paid back, including hundreds of millions of dollars disbursed within Eastern Washington.

According to court documents and information presented at the sentencing hearing, Crawford 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 for himself at least \$186,971 in PPP and EIDL funding for which he was not eligible.

Crawford also facilitated the submission of false and fraudulent PPP and EIDL applications for numerous other individuals as well. During a search of Crawford's home, law enforcement seized a laptop that contained falsified tax documentation and applications for other persons. Investigation of those fraudulent documents identified an additional twenty-four PPP and EIDL payments, totaling \$565,808.33. Investigators also identified over \$20,000 in payments those individuals made to Crawford following receipt of the funds. In total, Crawford caused a loss of over \$750,000 to the PPP and EIDL programs.

"Fighting fraud strengthens our communities by protecting our small and local businesses and hard-working people who play by the rules. Mr. Crawford took advantage of programs designed to help businesses struggling during a global pandemic and used the funds to enrich himself and others," said U.S. Attorney Waldref. "My office has built strong relationships with our law enforcement partners through our COVID Fraud Strike Force to vigorously prosecute those who abuse and misuse pandemic relief funding."

"When our nation and many employers were at their most desperate, Mr. Crawford defrauded those programs providing a lifeline to struggling businesses," said Acting Special Agent in Charge Matthew Murphy, who oversees HSI operations in the Pacific Northwest. "HSI will always work with our partners to prevent these types of schemes, safeguard our communities, and ensure relief funds never end up in the hands of criminals."

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, Department of Labor (DOL), and others.

This case was investigated by the HSI Spokane Field Office, TIGTA, SBA OIG, DOL, 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.

2:24-CR-00010-TOR

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Updated November 18, 2024