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**Department of Justice**

U.S. Attorney's Office

Eastern District of Washington

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, September 21, 2022

## **Moses Lake Resident Pleads Guilty to Fraudulently Obtaining \$50,000 in COVID-19 Relief Funds**

Spokane, Washington – Vanessa R. Waldref, the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Washington, announced today that Dondre Charles Jackson, age 29, of Moses Lake, Washington, pled guilty to fraudulently obtaining \$49,999 in COVID-19 relief funds. This case is part of the Eastern Washington COVID-19 Fraud Strike Force launched by the U.S. Attorney's Office earlier this year. District Judge Thomas O. Rice accepted Thomas' guilty plea, and set sentencing for January 5, 2023 at 10:00 a.m. 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 such program, the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), provided forgivable loans to eligible small businesses for job retention and certain other expenses.

According to the plea agreement and information disclosed in court proceedings, Jackson fraudulently obtained two PPP loans totaling \$49,999 for his purported catering and food service business, and submitted fraudulent tax documentation in support of his application. According to the plea agreement and other information disclosed during court proceedings, Jackson's business was fictitious, the documentation he provided was false and fraudulent, and he was therefore not eligible for any PPP funding.

"COVID-19 relief programs quickly ran out of money due to the number of people and businesses that requested funding, which meant that some deserving small businesses were not able to obtain funding to keep their businesses in operation during the COVID-19 pandemic," said U.S. Attorney Waldref. "We created the Eastern Washington COVID-19 Fraud Strike Force because it is critical to the strength and safety of our communities that we all work together to combat pandemic-related fraud and bring much-needed accountability to these programs. The Strike Force works to ensure that limited resources are used to protect our local small businesses and the critical jobs and services that they provide for the community."

In February 2022, U.S. Attorney Waldref and the U.S. Attorney's Office 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 U.S. Attorney's Office, 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, Internal Revenue Service, Department of Energy OIG, Department of Homeland Security OIG, and others. Cases investigated and prosecuted by the Strike Force have resulted in numerous indictments, criminal prosecutions, and other penalties.

"I commend the stellar investigative work on these cases performed by the Strike Force and especially in this case by SBA OIG and the Secret Service," said U.S. Attorney Waldref. "We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to strengthen our communities by protecting our small and local businesses."

"In addition to the Small Business Administration, Office of Inspector General and other Task Force partners, Greg Ligouri, Resident Agent in Charge of the Spokane Office of the U.S. Secret Service, expressed his thanks and appreciation to the Grant County Sheriff's Office and Moses Lake Police Department for their collaboration in this investigation. RAIC Ligouri went on to say that communities are safer and better served when law enforcement agencies are able to marshal resources as was done in this case."

The case was investigated by the Eastern Washington COVID-19 Fraud Strike Force, and in particular by the SBA OIG and U.S. Secret Service. Assistant United States Attorneys Dan Fruchter and Tyler H.L. Tornabene are prosecuting this case on behalf of the United States.

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