

United States Attorney's Eastern Washington COVID-19 Strike Force Announces Additional Indictments, Arrests

Thursday, February 8, 2024

For Immediate Release

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

Spokane, Washington – Vanessa R. Waldref, the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Washington, announced today that a federal grand jury has returned two additional indictments in connection with fraudulent COVID-19 relief funding. The indictments are the most recent charges announced by the Eastern Washington COVID-19 Strike Force, which has brought criminal charges against dozens of individuals and companies and recovered millions of dollars in fraudulently obtained COVID relief funding.

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.

The Indictments announced today charge two Spokane-area individuals in two separate cases. The Indictment in *United States v. Crawford* charges Antonio Feliciano Crawford, age 54, of Mead, Washington, with 30 counts of wire fraud, bank fraud, and false claims arising from PPP and EIDL applications submitted 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.” The Indictment alleges that 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.

In *United States v. Oberg*, the Indictment alleges that Cheryl Lynn Oberg, age 59, of Spokane, Washington, knowingly participated in a fraud scheme and conspiracy in which Oberg obtained \$150,000 in EIDL funding based on a fraudulent application submitted in the name of a periodontal business in Mississippi with which Oberg had no involvement. The Indictment alleges that, while the Mississippi-based business did exist, the application was fraudulent, was submitted without the knowledge of the business, and the EIDL funds went to Oberg, who distributed some of the funds to co-conspirators, and used the remainder to fully pay off an outstanding loan on her personal vehicle. The Indictment further alleges that Oberg lied to FBI investigators when questioned about the scheme.

“COVID-19 relief programs were designed to provide a lifeline to struggling businesses during the pandemic. Due to the number of people and businesses that requested funding, some deserving businesses were not able to obtain funding to keep their business in operation. We created the Eastern Washington COVID-19 Fraud Strike Force to hold those accountable who abused these critical programs,” stated U.S. Attorney Waldref. “My Office will continue to lead the effort to prosecute those who stole money intended for those in legitimate need.”

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.

The charges against Crawford carry a maximum of up to 30 years in federal prison, while the charges against Oberg carry a 20-year maximum.

United States v. Crawford was investigated by the Eastern District of Washington COVID-19 Fraud Strike Force and by TIGTA, HSI Spokane Field Office, SBA OIG, and the Department of Homeland Security OIG, and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys [Dan Fruchter](#) and [Tyler H.L. Tornabene](#).

United States v. Oberg was investigated by the COVID-19 Fraud Strike Force and by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Spokane Resident Agency, with analytical support and assistance from SBA OIG, and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys [Jeremy J. Kelley](#) and [Devin Curda](#).

An indictment is merely an allegation and all defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

United States v. Crawford: 2:24-CR-00010-TOR

United States v. Oberg: 2:24-CR-00009-TOR

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