THE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT of JUSTICE

United States Attorney's Office
District of Oregon

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District of Oregon's COVID Fraud Task Force Secures More Than $314 million in Restitution, Forfeitures, and Civil Recoveries

PORTLAND, Ore.— U.S. Attorney Scott E. Bradford is pleased to announce a series of criminal and civil enforcement actions to combat fraud involving federal pandemic relief funds. Since June 2026, the District of Oregon's Covid Fraud Task Force has brought 12 enforcement actions involving more than $29 million in losses and thus far resulting in more than $8.6 million in recovery. Since 2020, the District's COVID Fraud Task Force recovered more than $314 million and held fraudsters accountable through similar efforts.

The District's COVID Fraud Task Force brings together investigators and Assistant U.S. Attorneys from a dozen agencies to combat fraud involving pandemic-relief programs in Oregon and across the country through an integrated, multi-agency approach that coordinates criminal prosecution, civil enforcement, and asset recovery. Its work has focused on schemes targeting the Small Business Administration's (SBA) Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program, Restaurant Revitalization Fund (RRF), and other federal relief programs. This task force has set a national standard for combating pandemic-relief fraud.

"These criminals exploited pandemic programs meant to keep honest small businesses alive. By aggressively pursuing pandemic-related fraud, we're protecting the local businesses that follow the law, serve our communities, and drive our economy. Our small, dedicated multi-agency team delivers an exceptional return for the American taxpayer—holding offenders accountable and recovering hundreds of millions in settlements, seizures, and restitution. And when possible, we work cooperatively with companies to return improperly obtained taxpayer funds. Fraud, waste, and abuse don't stand a chance," said Scott E. Bradford, U.S. Attorney for the District of Oregon.

"Intentional misrepresentation to gain access to SBA program funds intended for the nation's small businesses is reprehensible," said SBA Office of Inspector General's Western Region Special Agent in Charge Timothy Larson. "Our Office will remain relentless in the pursuit of fraudsters who seek to exploit SBA's vital economic programs. I want to thank the U.S. Attorney's Office and our law enforcement partners for their dedication and commitment to seeing justice served."

The following cases highlight the COVID Fraud Task Force's work over the past few months:

U.S. v Benjamin Young, David Starling, and Adam Starling

On June 9, 2026, a federal grand jury returned an indictment charging Benjamin Young and David Starling with one count of conspiracy to defraud the United States and Young with 12 counts of wire fraud. Adam Starling previously pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to defraud the United States.

The indictment alleges, and Adam Starling admitted in his plea agreement, that participants in the conspiracy fabricated employee and wage records to obtain Employee Retention Credits and Qualified Sick and Family Leave Credits. Co-conspirators listed relatives as employees of one another's businesses even though those relatives performed little to no work. The purported employees included one co-conspirator's two-year-old twins. The wages were reported and filed with the IRS, seeking over $3 million in COVID-19 related tax credits. The scheme also used fabricated IRS records to support PPP loan applications to the SBA that were later forgiven based on false information.

The indictment further alleges that Young fraudulently obtained approximately $1.6 million in PPP loan forgiveness in the name of a victim nonprofit organization and used fabricated records to obtain a $2.5 million SBA-guaranteed business loan. Young allegedly misappropriated the loan proceeds and used them to acquire real property. In November 2025, the United States seized properties owned by Young, including this one, that allegedly were purchased with proceeds of the schemes.

U.S. v Melissa Fireside

On September 1, 2026, a federal grand jury returned an indictment charging Melissa Fireside, a former Clackamas County Commissioner, with two counts of wire fraud. According to the indictment, Fireside sought PPP and EIDL loans, totaling more than $300,000, for a business that did not exist in the name of an adult for whom she provided care. The applications included false statements about the non-existent business, including employees and gross revenues. Fireside also included fabricated supporting documentation including tax documents and bank records. Fireside diverted the PPP loan proceeds for personal use. Fireside has since fled the United States and is a fugitive from justice. Anyone with information is urged to contact the District of Oregon United State Marshals Service Office, the United State Marshals Service Communications Center at 1-800-336-0102, or submit a tip using USMS Tips.

U.S. v K'Lum Strickland

On September 1, 2025, a federal grand jury returned an indictment charging K'Lum Strickland with one count of wire fraud. According to the indictment, Strickland stole almost $70,000 through the PPP and EIDL programs. To obtain the loans, Strickland submitted applications with false information, including non-existent businesses, false gross revenues, and false IRS documents. Strickland spent all of the loan proceeds for personal expenses.

U.S. v Beniamin Lucescu

On September 11, 2026, a federal jury convicted Beniamin Lucescu of conspiracy, wire fraud, and money laundering for a scheme through which he defrauded the government out of approximately $487,000 in EIDL proceeds. As proven at trial, Lucescu claimed he was obtaining the loans for Rose City Senior Care, a home senior care business he operated with his wife.

Lucescu falsely certified the proceeds would be used for business working capital and to address economic injury caused by the pandemic while he actually intended to, and did, use the funds to pay personal tax debt and make speculative cryptocurrency investments.

U.S. v Kenneth Burns

Kenneth Burns pleaded guilty to bank fraud for defrauding the government out of more than $230,000 in PPP loan proceeds. According to court documents, Burns submitted a loan application containing false information, including IRS documents and information about the business.

On July 7, 2026, Burns failed to appear for his scheduled sentencing hearing, and a bench warrant was issued for his arrest as a wanted fugitive from justice. Anyone with information is urged to contact the District of Oregon United State Marshals Service Office, the United State Marshals Service Communications Center at 1-800-336-0102, or submit a tip using USMS Tips.

U.S. v Joel Caswell

On August 21, 2026, Joel Caswell was sentenced to 42 months in federal prison for fraud, tax violations, and identity theft. He was also ordered to pay $1,198,799.83 in restitution to the government. According to court records, Caswell executed multiple fraud schemes that involved submitting fabricated financial records to a bank, a private lender, and the SBA to secure loans. Caswell used the fraudulently obtained loans for personal expenses.

On September 1, 2026, another individual was charged for defrauding the SBA's PPP and EIDL loan programs for over $760,000. This case remains under seal.

Emerald Green Lawn Service, Inc.

On July 6, 2026, Emerald Green Lawn Service, Inc., executed a False Claims Act Civil Settlement Agreement to repay $71,485.19 of EIDL loan proceeds for knowingly submitting false applications to obtain EIDL loans.

Ramzy Hattar; and Zedan Outdoors, LLC d/b/a Talyor's Bar & Grill

On September 11, 2026, the United States filed a complaint against Ramzy Hattar and his associated business Zedan Outdoors, LLC, dba Taylor's Bar & Grill for filing false claims in applications to obtain more than $350,000 in PPP and EIDL loans. According to the complaint, Taylor's Bar & Grill was not operating at the time it obtained the loans. The complaint further alleges that Hattar misused the loan proceeds.

Microtec Inc., formerly known as Lucidyne Technologies, Inc.

On August 27, 2026, Microtec Inc., which was formerly known as Lucidyne Technologies, Inc. agreed to pay the United States $1,554,137 to resolve an investigation into whether Lucidyne Technologies improperly certified its eligibility for a PPP loan. Microtec Inc. cooperated upon being contacted and resolved the issue.

Additional Civil Case Pending Execution:

On September 4, 2026, the United States reached a False Claims Act Civil Settlement Agreement in a sealed qui tam action with a company that improperly obtained PPP loans, recovering approximately $1.6 million.

The COVID Fraud Task Force continues to pursue criminal and civil enforcement actions aggressively with forthcoming matters on the horizon.

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