

Dominican National living in Massachusetts arrested for ID theft, COVID-19 PUA fraud

A Dominican National residing in Boston was arrested today for allegedly using others' identities to fraudulently obtain Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) benefits.

Wilson Radhames Peguero Brea, 52, was charged with one count of wire fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft. Following an initial appearance today before U.S. District Court Magistrate Judge Marianne B. Bowler, Peguero was detained pending a detention hearing scheduled for Dec. 22, 2021.

According to the charging documents, Peguero used the name and Social Security number of a U.S. citizen to apply for and obtain PUA benefits. Peguero also allegedly applied for and received additional PUA benefits using another victim's identity as well as his own.

The charge of wire fraud provides for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, up to three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000 or twice the gross gain or loss, whichever is greater. The charge of aggravated identity theft provides for a mandatory sentence of two years in prison, to be served consecutively to any other sentence imposed, up to one year of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based on the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

The investigation was conducted by Homeland Security's Investigation's Document and Benefit Fraud Task Force (DBFTF), a specialized field investigative group comprised of personnel from various local, state, and federal agencies with expertise in detecting, deterring, and disrupting organizations and

individuals involved in various types of document, identity, and benefit fraud schemes.

Acting United States Attorney Nathaniel R. Mendell and Matthew B. Millhollin, Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations in Boston, made the announcement today. Valuable assistance was provided by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General; U.S. Department of State, Diplomatic Security Service; U.S. Postal Inspection Service; Massachusetts State Police; and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services in Boston. Assistant U.S. Attorney Benjamin A. Saltzman of Mendell's Major Crimes Unit is prosecuting the case.

On May 17, 2021, the Attorney General established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with agencies across government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. The Task Force bolsters efforts to investigate and prosecute the most culpable domestic and international criminal actors and assists agencies tasked with administering relief programs to prevent fraud by, among other methods, augmenting and incorporating existing coordination mechanisms, identifying resources and techniques to uncover fraudulent actors and their schemes, and sharing and harnessing information and insights gained from prior enforcement efforts. For more information on the Department's response to the pandemic, please visit <https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus>.

Anyone with information about allegations of attempted fraud involving COVID-19 can report it by calling the Department of Justice's National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

The details contained in the criminal complaint are allegations. The defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.