

Ghanaian national living in Massachusetts pleads guilty in \$4 million romance scam fraud

“A Massachusetts man has pleaded guilty in federal court in Boston in connection with a wire fraud and money laundering scheme involving funds obtained from “romance scam” victims.

Kofi Osei, a/k/a Paul Proia, a/k/a Kenneth Buck, a/k/a Jeffrey Anashe, a/k/a Author Ivey, a/k/a David Label, a/k/a Manuel Abdalla, a/k/a Andrew Matses, 30, pleaded guilty on Sept. 16, 2022 to seven counts of making a false statement to a bank, six counts of wire fraud and two counts of money laundering. U.S. District Court Judge Indira Talwani scheduled sentencing for Jan. 20, 2023. Osei was charged in February 2021.

Between no later than 2016 through at least 2020, Osei opened bank accounts in the greater Boston area using fake identity documents. Those bank accounts were used to receive fraudulently obtained funds from a number of victims of romance scams, in which perpetrators create fictitious online personas to develop online romantic relationships with individuals in the United States and then leverage those relationships to obtain money and/or property. Once the fraudulently obtained funds reached the accounts controlled by Osei, Osei generally withdrew the money in cash, used the funds to purchase cashier’s checks, or spent the money on personal purchases. During a search of Osei’s residence and vehicle in February 2021, additional fake identity documents in the names of other aliases were recovered. In total, Osei opened more than 40 bank accounts using seven aliases. Those accounts received more than \$4 million in victim funds.

The charge of making a false statement to a bank provides for a sentence of up to 30 years in prison, five years of supervised release and a fine of \$1 million. The charge of wire fraud provides for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000, or twice the gross gain or loss from the scheme, whichever is greater. The charge of money laundering provides for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$500,000, or twice the value of the criminally derived property. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and statutes which govern the determination of a sentence in a criminal case.

United States Attorney Rachael S. Rollins; Joseph R. Bonavolonta, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Boston Division; Ketty Larco-Ward, Inspector in Charge of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Boston Division; and Matthew B. Millhollin, Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations in New England made the announcement. Assistant U.S. Attorney Kristen A. Kearney of Rollins' Securities, Financial & Cyber Fraud Unit is prosecuting the case." -Massachusetts Department of Justice.