

Nigerian national who lived in New Bedford sentenced to prison for romance scam, money laundering

Defendant previously extradited from the United Kingdom to face charges.

BOSTON – A former New Bedford man was sentenced yesterday for wire fraud and money laundering charges involving funds obtained from “romance scam” victims.

Chukwunonso “Douglas” Umegbo, a/k/a James Abbott, a/k/a Michael Philips, a/k/a Richard Armani, 39, was sentenced by U.S. Senior District Court Judge George A. O’Toole Jr. to 42 months in prison, followed by one year of supervised release. Umegbo was also ordered to pay restitution and forfeiture of \$578,954.78. In January 2024, Umegbo pleaded guilty to six counts of making a false statement to a bank, two counts of wire fraud and one count of money laundering. Umegbo was arrested in London in April 2022 and extradited to the United States in February 2023. He has remained in federal custody since.

Between no later than 2018 through at least 2019, Umegbo opened bank accounts in the greater Boston area using fake identity documents. The 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 U.S., and then leverage those relationships to obtain money and/or property. Once the fraudulently obtained funds reached the accounts controlled by Umegbo, Umegbo withdrew the money in cash, used the funds to purchase

cashier's checks, or spent the money. Altogether, the fraudulent accounts received more than \$568,000. Even after leaving the U.S., Umegbo continued to obtain bank account information from co-conspirators in Massachusetts, to whom he directed victim funds.

Acting United States Attorney Joshua S. Levy; Jodi Cohen, 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 Michael J. Krol, Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations in New England made the announcement today. The Justice Department's Office of International Affairs provided valuable assistance in securing the arrest and extradition from the U.K. of Umegbo. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Kristen A. Kearney and Leslie A. Wright of the Securities, Financial & Cyber Fraud Unit prosecuted the case."-Massachusetts Department of Justice.