



THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT *of* OHIO

[U.S. Attorneys](#) » [Southern District of Ohio](#) » [News](#)

**Department of Justice**

U.S. Attorney's Office

Southern District of Ohio

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, June 7, 2021

## **Lewis Center man pleads guilty to COVID-relief fraud scheme & laundering more than \$2.4M related to online romance scams**

COLUMBUS, Ohio – A Lewis Center man pleaded guilty in federal court today for his role in conspiring to launder the proceeds of online romance scams for roughly two years. He also admitted to fraudulently misapplying CARES Act loan funds to buy himself boats while out on release from his initial charges.

Eric Ahiekpor, 50, was indicted by a grand jury in June 2020 and charged by a superseding bill of information in May 2021.

In total, as part of the romance scams, bank accounts under Ahiekpor's control received more than \$2.4 million in criminally derived funds.

Kwame Yeboah, 37, of Columbus, has also pleaded guilty in the money laundering scheme. Robert Asante, 36, of Canal Winchester, was charged in the money laundering scheme and is awaiting trial.

According to court documents, individuals committing fraud created several profiles on online dating sites. They then contacted men and women throughout the United States and elsewhere, with whom they cultivated a sense of affection, and often, romance.

After establishing relationships, perpetrators of the romance scams requested money, typically for investment or need-based reasons, and provided victims with account information and directions for where money should be sent. In part, these accounts were in the names of Ahiekpor and his co-defendants, in the names of the defendants' family members, and in the names of the defendants' companies. The funds were not used for the purposes claimed by the perpetrators of the romance scams.

Ahiekpor is not accused of committing romance fraud. Instead, by pleading guilty he admits that he helped the perpetrators of the romance fraud move the fraud proceeds from the United States to Ghana.

While he was on release in the romance scam case, in a separate and unrelated scheme, Ahiekpor obtained a coronavirus relief loan for \$150,000 and fraudulently misapplied the loan proceeds. In June 2020, Ahiekpor submitted an application for an Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) on behalf of Premier Choice Health Services, a business he owned.

The EIDL Program is designed to provide economic relief to small businesses that are currently experiencing a temporary loss of revenue. The EIDL Program was expanded under the CARES Act. EIDL proceeds can be used for working capital and normal operating expenses, such as continuation of health care benefits, rent, utilities and fixed debt payments. EIDL proceeds cannot be used for the applicant's personal benefit.

One day after receiving the relief funds, Ahiekpor bought a 2017 Sun Tracker "Fishin' Barge 22 DKX" boat for \$32,000, motor and boat trailer. Shortly thereafter, he also purchased a 1995 Sea Ray Sundancer boat. He continued to fraudulently misapply the EIDL proceeds after his release from his money laundering charges.

Conspiracy to launder money and wire fraud are federal crimes punishable by up to 20 years in prison and a fine, as well as forfeiture of any proceeds involved in the crimes.

Vipal J. Patel, Acting United States Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio, and Bryant Jackson, Special Agent in Charge, Internal Revenue Service – Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI), announced the plea entered into today before U.S. District Judge Sarah D. Morrison. Assistant United States Attorney Peter K. Glenn-Applegate is representing the United States in this case.

###

---

**Topic(s):**

Coronavirus

Financial Fraud

**Component(s):**

USAO - Ohio, Southern

**Contact:**

jennifer.thornton@usdoj.gov

Updated June 7, 2021

