

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF ARKANSAS
HARRISON DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)
)
v.)
)
CRYSTAL PAYNE)

CRIMINAL NO. 3:21-CR-30002-001

PLEA AGREEMENT

Pursuant to Rule 11(c)(1) of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure, the parties hereto acknowledge that they have entered into negotiations which have resulted in this Agreement. The agreement of the parties is as follows:

**WAIVER OF INDICTMENT AND
PLEA OF GUILTY TO INFORMATION**

1. The Defendant, CRYSTAL PAYNE, agrees to waive Indictment by a grand jury, and consents to the filing of an Information charging the Defendant with False Statement, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1001(a)(3). The Defendant further agrees to plead guilty to the Information.

CONSENT TO PROCEED BEFORE THE MAGISTRATE JUDGE

2. The Defendant acknowledges that she has been advised and understands that she has a right to have a United States District Judge presiding when she enters a guilty plea and that she can exercise that right without concern or reservation. The Defendant and the United States hereby consent to have the proceedings required by Rule 11 of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure incident to the making of the plea to be conducted by the United States Magistrate Judge. If, after conducting such proceedings, the Magistrate Judge recommends that the plea of guilty be accepted, a presentence investigation and report will be ordered pursuant to Federal Rule

of Criminal Procedure 32. The Defendant acknowledges that her plea of guilty is subject to approval and acceptance by the District Judge and that sentencing will be conducted by the District Judge.

**WAIVER OF OBJECTIONS TO MAGISTRATE'S
REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

3. The parties acknowledge that pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(B), the failure to file objections to the Report and Recommendation within fourteen (14) days bars them from objecting to the District Court's acceptance of the guilty plea as recommended by the Magistrate Judge. Having been advised of the right to object to the Report and Recommendation, the parties wish to waive that right for the purpose of expediting acceptance of the guilty plea in this matter. Accordingly, evidenced by their signatures appearing below, the parties hereby waive the right to object to the Magistrate Judge's Report and Recommendation Concerning Plea of Guilty, and consent to acceptance of the same by the United States District Judge so that acceptance of the guilty plea may proceed forthwith.

ADMISSION OF FACTUAL BASIS IN SUPPORT OF GUILTY PLEA

4. The Defendant has fully discussed with defense counsel the facts of this case and the elements of the crime to which the Defendant is pleading guilty. The Defendant has committed each of the elements of the crime to which the Defendant is pleading guilty, and admits that there is a factual basis for this guilty plea. The following facts are true and undisputed:

- a. On March 27, 2020, the United States Government enacted the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which provided economic stimulus for individuals and businesses affected by the Coronavirus pandemic.

- b. This economic stimulus includes the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP): a series of forgivable loans, guaranteed by the Small Business Administration---an agency of the United States government.
- c. To obtain a PPP loan, a qualifying business must submit a PPP loan application, which is signed by an authorized representative of the business. The PPP loan application requires the business, through its authorized representative, to acknowledge the program rules and make certain affirmative certifications in order to be eligible to obtain the PPP loan. In the PPP loan application, the small business must state, among other things, its average monthly payroll expense; and number of employees. These figures are used to calculate the amount of money the small business is eligible to receive under the PPP. In addition, businesses applying for a PPP loan must provide documentation showing their payroll expenses.
- d. A PPP loan application must be processed by a participating lender. If a PPP loan application is approved, the participating lender funds the PPP loan using its own monies, which are 100% guaranteed by SBA. Data from the application, including information about the borrower, the total amount of the loan, and the listed number of employees, is transmitted by the lender to the SBA in the course of processing the loan.
- e. PPP loan proceeds must be used by the business on certain permissible expenses--- payroll costs, interest on mortgages, rent, and utilities. The PPP allows the interest and principal on the PPP loan to be entirely forgiven if the business spends the loan proceeds on these expense items within a designated period of time after

receiving the proceeds and uses a certain amount of the PPP loan proceeds on payroll expenses.

- f. On or about July 16, 2020, CRYSTAL PAYNE submitted an online application from a location in Harrison, Arkansas, for a PPP loan to Seattle Bank. On the application, which PAYNE initialed and signed, she represented that she had a 100% ownership interest in the business “B Bird Stitching.” The application represented that the business had a monthly average payroll of \$53,642.00.
- g. PAYNE initialed the form to demonstrate that she understood that “[t]he [loan] funds will be used to retain workers and maintain payroll or make mortgage interest payments, lease payments, and utility payments as specified under the Paycheck Protection Program Rule” and that “if the funds are knowingly used for unauthorized purposes, the federal government may hold me legally liable, such as for charges of fraud.”
- h. She further initialed a section stating that “the information provided in this application and the information in all supporting documents and forms in true and accurate in all material respects,” and that “knowingly making a false statement to obtain a guaranteed loan from SBA is punishable under the law, including under 18 USC 1001 and 3571[.]”
- i. Despite these representations, PAYNE knew that B Bird Stitching had no such payroll obligation. During a December 11, 2020 interview with Federal Agents, PAYNE related that B Bird Stitching has existed since approximately December 2019 or January 2020. PAYNE related that B Bird Stitching “hadn’t really made

any money yet[]” and that “[i]t hasn’t really gotten going.” PAYNE further admitted that she electronically initialed and signed the PPP loan application.

- j. In addition, PAYNE’s loan application included a falsified IRS Schedule C (Profit or Loss From Business), which represented B Bird Stitching’s 2019 gross sales as \$1.2 million and net profit as \$643,700.00.
- k. The loan application also contained a notarized document, signed by PAYNE, entitled “Certificate of Persons Conducting Business Under an Assumed Name.” The document, executed on July 1, 2020, certified that PAYNE was conducting business as “B Bird Stitching.”
- l. The loan application directed the funds to be deposited into Centennial Bank account *****593, which was opened on July 1, 2020 by PAYNE doing business as “B Bird Stitching.” PPP loan proceeds of \$20,833.00 were deposited into this account on July 21, 2020. PAYNE withdrew the majority of the funds, \$19,000, on September 16, 2020.
- m. Accordingly, the United States could prove beyond a reasonable doubt that on or about July 16, 2020, PAYNE knowingly made a false statement on an application for a PPP loan, a program within the jurisdiction of the SBA, which is a federal agency.

ADVICE OF RIGHTS

5. The Defendant hereby acknowledges that she has been advised of and fully understands the following constitutional and statutory rights:
 - a. to have an attorney and if the Defendant cannot afford an attorney, to have one provided to her and paid for at the United States’ expense;
 - b. to persist in her plea of not guilty;
 - c. to have a speedy and public trial by jury;

- d. to be presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt;
- e. to confront and examine witnesses who testify against her;
- f. to call witnesses on her behalf;
- g. to choose to testify or not testify and that no one could force the Defendant to testify; and,
- h. to have at least 30 days to prepare for trial.

WAIVER OF RIGHTS

6. The Defendant hereby acknowledges that she understands with respect to each count to which she pleads guilty, she thereby WAIVES all of the rights listed as (b) through (h) of the above paragraph.

WAIVER OF ACCESS TO RECORDS

7. The Defendant hereby waives all rights, whether asserted directly or by a representative, to request or receive from any department or agency of the United States any records pertaining to the investigation or prosecution of this case, including without limitation any records that may be sought under the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552, or the Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. § 552a.

WAIVER OF "HYDE" CLAIM

8. The Defendant hereby waives any claim under the Hyde Amendment, 18 U.S.C. § 3006A, for attorney fees and other litigation expenses arising out of the investigation or prosecution of this matter.

EFFECTS OF BREACH OF THIS AGREEMENT BY DEFENDANT

9. The Defendant agrees that if after signing this Plea Agreement the Defendant commits any crimes, violates any conditions of release, or fails to appear for sentencing, or if the Defendant provides information to the Probation Office or the Court that is intentionally misleading, intentionally incomplete, or intentionally untruthful, or if the Defendant violates any term of this Plea Agreement, takes a position at sentencing which is contrary to the terms of this

Plea Agreement or attempts to withdraw from this Plea Agreement, this shall constitute a breach of this Plea Agreement which shall release the United States from any and all restrictions or obligations placed upon it under the terms of this agreement and the United States shall be free to reinstate dismissed charges or pursue additional charges against the Defendant. The Defendant shall, however, remain bound by the terms of the agreement, and will not be allowed to withdraw this plea of guilty unless permitted to do so by the Court.

10. The Defendant further agrees that a breach of any provisions of this Plea Agreement shall operate as a WAIVER of Defendant's rights under Rule 11(f) of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure and Rule 410 of the Federal Rules of Evidence and the United States shall be allowed to use and to introduce into evidence any one or more of the following:

- a. admissions against interest, both oral and written, made by the Defendant to any person;
- b. statements made by the Defendant during her change of plea hearing;
- c. the factual basis set forth in the Plea Agreement;
- d. any testimony given under oath in these proceedings or to a grand jury or a petit jury;
- e. any and all physical evidence of any kind which the Defendant has provided to the United States; and,
- f. any and all information provided by the Defendant to the United States' attorneys, or to federal, state, county, and/or local law enforcement officers.

MAXIMUM PENALTIES

11. The Defendant hereby acknowledges that she has been advised of the maximum penalties for each count to which she is pleading guilty. By entering a plea of guilty to Count One of the Information, the Defendant agrees that she faces:

- a. a maximum term of imprisonment for five years;
- b. a maximum fine of \$250,000;
- c. both imprisonment and fine;
- d. a term of supervised release which begins after release from prison;
- e. a possibility of going back to prison if the Defendant violates the conditions of supervised release;
- f. a special assessment of \$100,00 for each count of conviction; and,

- g. restitution as ordered by the Court.

CONDITIONS OF SUPERVISED RELEASE

12. The Defendant acknowledges that if a term of supervised release is imposed as part of the sentence, the Defendant will be subject to the standard conditions of supervised release as recommended by the United States Sentencing Commission and may be subject to other special conditions of supervised release as determined by the Court. The standard conditions of supervised release are as follows:

- a. The Defendant shall report to the probation office in the federal judicial district where she is authorized to reside within 72 hours of release from imprisonment, unless the probation officer instructs the Defendant to report to a different probation office or within a different time frame.
- b. After initially reporting to the probation office, the Defendant will receive instructions from the court or the probation officer about how and when to report to the probation officer, and the Defendant shall report to the probation officer as instructed.
- c. The Defendant shall not knowingly leave the federal judicial district where he or she is authorized to reside without first getting permission from the court or the probation officer.
- d. The Defendant shall answer truthfully the questions asked by the probation officer.
- e. The Defendant shall live at a place approved by the probation officer. If the Defendant plans to change where he or she lives or anything about his or her living arrangements (such as the people the Defendant lives with), the Defendant shall notify the probation officer at least 10 days before the change. If notifying the probation officer at least 10 days in advance is not possible due to unanticipated circumstances, the Defendant shall notify the probation officer within 72 hours of becoming aware of a change or expected change.
- f. The Defendant shall allow the probation officer to visit the Defendant at any time at his or her home or elsewhere, and the Defendant shall permit the probation officer to take any items prohibited by the conditions of the Defendant's supervision that he or she observes in plain view.
- g. The Defendant shall work full time (at least 30 hours per week) at a lawful type of employment, unless the probation officer excuses the defendant from doing so. If the Defendant does not have full-time employment he or she shall try to find full-time employment, unless the probation officer excuses the defendant from doing so. If the Defendant plans to change where the Defendant works or anything about his or her work (such as the position or the job responsibilities), the Defendant shall notify the probation officer at least 10 days before the change. If notifying the probation officer at least 10 days in advance is not possible due to unanticipated circumstances, the Defendant shall notify the probation officer within 72 hours of

becoming aware of a change or expected change.

- h. The Defendant shall not communicate or interact with someone the Defendant knows is engaged in criminal activity. If the Defendant knows someone has been convicted of a felony, the Defendant shall not knowingly communicate or interact with that person without first getting the permission of the probation officer.
- i. If the Defendant is arrested or questioned by a law enforcement officer, the Defendant shall notify the probation officer within 72 hours.
- j. The Defendant shall not own, possess, or have access to a firearm, ammunition, destructive device, or dangerous weapon (i.e., anything that was designed, or was modified for, the specific purpose of causing bodily injury or death to another person, such as nunchakus or Tasers).
- k. The Defendant shall not act or make any agreement with a law enforcement agency to act as a confidential human source or informant without first getting the permission of the court.
- l. If the probation officer determines that the Defendant poses a risk to another person (including an organization), the probation officer may require the Defendant to notify the person about the risk and the Defendant shall comply with that instruction. The probation officer may contact the person and confirm that the Defendant has notified the person about the risk.
- m. The Defendant shall follow the instructions of the probation officer related to the conditions of supervision.

RESTITUTION

13. The Defendant agrees to pay full restitution to all victims of the offense to which the Defendant is pleading guilty, to all victims of any offense dismissed as a result of this Plea Agreement, and for all losses caused by the Defendant's criminal conduct even if such losses resulted from crimes not charged in the Indictment or Information or admitted to by the Defendant in the factual statement. The Defendant acknowledges and agrees that all restitution as agreed to above shall be governed by the provisions of the Mandatory Victims Restitution Act, 18 U.S.C. § 3663A. The Defendant understands full restitution will be ordered regardless of Defendant's financial resources. The Defendant further understands the restitution will be determined by the Court. The Defendant agrees to cooperate in efforts to collect the restitution obligation, by any means the United States deems appropriate and agrees to waive any defense or objections to any action to enforce the collection of the restitution. The Defendant understands imposition or

payment of restitution will not restrict or preclude the filing of any civil suit or administrative action. The Defendant acknowledges that any restitution imposed is not dischargeable in any bankruptcy proceeding pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3613(e).

AGREEMENT TO PROVIDE FINANCIAL INFORMATION

14. The defendant agrees that no later than thirty (30) days after the change of plea, the defendant shall complete the financial disclosure statement and the accompanying releases provided by the United States Attorney's Office and deliver them to the United States Probation Office and the United States Attorney's Office. This financial disclosure statement is sworn by the defendant to be true and correct under penalty of perjury. The defendant agrees that her failure to truthfully and fully complete the financial disclosure statement and accompanying releases may result in the government objecting to the defendant receiving a reduction for acceptance of responsibility.

PAYMENT OF MONETARY PENALTIES

15. The Defendant agrees that monetary penalties to include special assessments, fine, and/or restitution imposed by the Court will be (i) subject to immediate enforcement as provided in 18 U.S.C. § 3613c, and (ii), submitted to the Treasury Offset Program so that any federal payment such as an income tax refund or transfer of returned property the defendant receives may be offset and applied to federal debt without affecting the periodic payment schedule ordered by the Court.

NO OTHER CHARGES

16. The United States agrees that no other federal charges, which stem from the activities described in the Information, will be brought against the Defendant in the Western District of Arkansas.

SENTENCING GUIDELINES ARE ADVISORY BUT NOT MANDATORY

17. The parties acknowledge that the Court shall consult and take into account the United States Sentencing Commission Guidelines in determining the sentence, but that the Court is not bound by the Guidelines and may sentence the Defendant to any sentence within the statutory range.

AGREEMENT DOES NOT PROMISE A SPECIFIC SENTENCE

18. The Defendant acknowledges that discussions have taken place concerning the possible guideline range which might be applicable to this case. The Defendant agrees that any discussions merely attempt to guess at what appears to be the correct guideline range and do not bind the District Court. Further, the Defendant acknowledges that the actual range may be greater than contemplated by the parties. In the event that the actual guideline range is greater than the parties expected, the Defendant agrees that this does not give her the right to withdraw her plea of guilty.

RELEVANT CONDUCT CONSIDERED

19. At the sentencing hearing, the United States will be permitted to bring to the Court's attention, and the Court will be permitted to consider, all relevant information with respect to the Defendant's background, character and conduct, including the conduct that is the subject of this investigation for which she has not been charged up to the date of this Agreement, and/or which is the basis for any of the counts which will be dismissed pursuant to this agreement, as provided by § 1B1.3 of the Sentencing Guidelines.

PERJURY

20. In the event that it is determined that the Defendant has not been truthful with the Court as to any statements made while under oath, this Plea Agreement shall not be construed to

protect the Defendant from prosecution for perjury or false statement.

CONCESSIONS BY THE UNITED STATES

21. The United States agrees not to object to a recommendation by the Probation Office or a ruling of the Court which awards the Defendant an appropriate-level decrease in the base offense level for acceptance of responsibility. If the offense level in the Presentence Report is 16 or greater and the Court accepts a recommendation in the Presentence Report that the Defendant receive two points for acceptance of responsibility, the United States agrees to move for an additional one-point reduction for acceptance of responsibility for a total of three points. However, the United States will not be obligated to move for an additional one-point reduction or recommend any adjustment for acceptance of responsibility if the Defendant engages in conduct inconsistent with acceptance of responsibility including, but not limited to, the following a) falsely denies, or makes a statement materially inconsistent with, the factual basis set forth in this agreement, b) falsely denies additional relevant conduct in the offense, c) is untruthful with the United States, the Court or probation officer, or d) materially breaches this Plea Agreement in any way.

UNITED STATES' RESERVATION OF RIGHTS

22. Although the United States agrees not to object to certain findings by the Probation Office or to rulings of the Court, it reserves the right to:

- a. make all facts known to the Probation Office and to the Court;
- b. call witnesses and introduce evidence in support of the Presentence Report;
- c. contest and appeal any finding of fact or application of the Sentencing Guidelines;
- d. contest and appeal any departure from the appropriate Guideline range; and,
- e. defend all rulings of the District Court on appeal including those rulings which may be contrary to recommendations made or positions taken by the United States in this Plea Agreement which are favorable to the Defendant.

NO RIGHT TO WITHDRAW THE GUILTY PLEA

23. The United States' concessions on sentencing options are non-binding and made

pursuant to Rule 11(c)(1)(B) of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure. As a result, if the Court should reject the Defendant's requests or recommendations for certain findings of fact or applications of the Guidelines, the Defendant acknowledges that there is no right to withdraw the guilty plea.

AGREEMENT NOT BINDING ON THE COURT

24. The parties agree that nothing in this Agreement binds the District Court to:
- a. make any specific finding of fact;
 - b. make any particular application of the Sentencing Guidelines;
 - c. hand down any specific sentence;
 - d. accept any stipulation of the parties as contained in this Plea Agreement;
and,
 - e. accept this Plea Agreement.
25. The United States and the Defendant acknowledge that the Court has an obligation to review the Presentence Report before it accepts or rejects this Plea Agreement.

AGREEMENT DOES NOT BIND ANY OTHER ENTITY

26. The parties agree that this Plea Agreement does not bind any governmental entity other than the United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of Arkansas.

SPECIAL ASSESSMENT

27. The Defendant agrees to pay \$100.00 as the special assessment in this case.

REPRESENTATIONS BY DEFENDANT

28. By signing this Plea Agreement, the Defendant acknowledges that:
- a. The Defendant has read this Agreement (or has had this Agreement read to her) and has carefully reviewed every part of it with defense counsel.
 - b. The Defendant fully understands this Plea Agreement and is not under the influence of anything that could impede the Defendant's ability to fully understand this Plea Agreement.
 - c. No promises, agreements, understandings, or conditions have been made or entered into in connection with the decision to plead guilty except those set forth in this Plea Agreement.
 - d. The Defendant is satisfied with the legal services provided by defense

- c. counsel in connection with this Plea Agreement and matters related to it. The Defendant has entered into this Plea Agreement freely, voluntarily, and without reservation and the Defendant's desire to enter a plea of guilty is not the result of threats or coercion directed at the Defendant or anyone connected with the Defendant.


REPRESENTATIONS BY DEFENSE COUNSEL

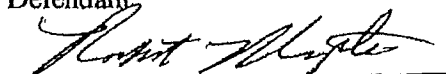
29. By signing this Plea Agreement, counsel for the Defendant acknowledges that:
- a. Counsel has carefully reviewed every part of this Agreement with the Defendant and this Agreement accurately and completely sets forth the entire agreement between the United States and the Defendant.
 - b. Counsel has explained the ramifications of the Plea Agreement to the Defendant, and believes that the Defendant understands this Plea Agreement, what rights are being lost by pleading guilty, and what the United States has agreed to do in exchange for the plea of guilty.
 - c. Counsel believes that the Defendant's decision to enter into this Agreement is an informed and voluntary one.

PLEA AGREEMENT CONSTITUTES THE ENTIRE AGREEMENT

30. The Defendant and her attorney both acknowledge that this Plea Agreement constitutes the entire agreement of the parties. Further, all parties agree that there are no oral agreements or promises which have been made to induce the Defendant to change her plea to guilty.

Dated this 14th day of February 2021.


CRYSTAL PAYNE
Defendant


ROBERT MARQUETTE
Attorney for Defendant

DAVID CLAY FOWLKS
FIRST ASSISTANT UNITED STATES ATTORNEY

By: 
HUNTER BRIDGES
Assistant U.S. Attorney