



THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE  
DISTRICT *of* ARIZONA

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**Department of Justice**

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of Arizona

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, December 17, 2020

## **Four Charged with Covid-19 Fraud**

PHOENIX, Ariz. – Today, the United States Attorney's Office made public a complaint against Celestine Coletta Strong, 44, of Phoenix, Arizona; Jawuan Polk, 35, of Portland, Oregon; Patrick Earl Lewis, 45, residence unknown; and Ty'zhaun Marqui Lewis, 23, of Phoenix, Arizona with charges including conspiracy, wire fraud, and money laundering in connection with fraudulent Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan applications.

"PPP loans have been essential to the survival of small businesses during the pandemic," said United States Attorney Michael Bailey. "It is reprehensible that some people would choose to take advantage of the program to fraudulently fill their own pockets rather than leaving that money for those who truly need it."

According to the complaint, Strong, Polk, P. Lewis and T. Lewis devised a scheme to fraudulently obtain loans from the CARES Act Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), a program designed to help small businesses meet their payroll obligations during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the complaint, the four conspired to submit loan applications with falsified employee and wage information, fake bank statements, and other false information in an attempt to obtain 15 different loans totaling more than \$3.5 million in loan proceeds. They fraudulently obtained approximately \$450,000 in proceeds before the scheme was interrupted. Some of the proceeds were used to purchase a luxury Mercedes E400, which was also seized.

"Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) along with our government and private sector partners are committed to protecting the American public against those who willingly attempt to defraud the government for financial gain," said Scott Brown, special agent in charge for the HSI Phoenix Office. "We will continue to use our broad legal authorities and longstanding partnerships to disrupt, investigate and bring to justice those who seek to exploit and benefit from the COVID-19 pandemic."

"The Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration will aggressively pursue those who endeavor to defraud taxpayer-funded Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act programs, which were established to provide assistance to American business owners during these unprecedented times," said J. Russell George, Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration. "We appreciate the efforts of the U.S. Department Justice and our law enforcement partners in this effort."

United States Attorney Michael Bailey and Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich launched the COVID-19 Fraud Task Force in April 2020, leveraging the resources and expertise of more than twenty different federal

and state agencies to combat fraud schemes arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic. The investigation referenced above was conducted by Homeland Security Investigations with assistance from the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration and the Small Business Administration Office of the Inspector General. The prosecution is being handled by Assistant U.S. Attorney Kevin M. Rapp.

A conviction for wire fraud carries a maximum penalty of twenty years of imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, or both. A conviction for money laundering carries a maximum penalty of ten years of imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, or both.

A criminal complaint is simply the method by which a person is charged with criminal activity and raises no inference of guilt. An individual is presumed innocent until competent evidence is presented to a jury that establishes guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

### Complaint

CASE NUMBERS: 2:20-mj-05300-DMF  
RELEASE NUMBER: 2020-112\_PPP Loan Fraud

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### **Topic(s):**

Coronavirus

### **Component(s):**

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