



THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT of JUSTICE

United States Attorney's Office
District of Oregon

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Portland Housekeeper Pleads Guilty to Wire Fraud after Stealing Covid-Relief Funds

PORTLAND, Ore.—A Portland area housekeeper pleaded guilty today for perpetrating a scheme to steal funds intended to help small businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kimberly Aralene Wells, 40, a resident of Portland, pleaded guilty to one count of wire fraud.

According to court documents, by the summer of 2020, after Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to provide emergency financial assistance to millions of Americans suffering the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, Wells devised a scheme to defraud the Small Business Administration (SBA) by fraudulently applying for CARES Act-authorized Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans and Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL) using a fictitious shell company.

To perpetrate her scheme, Wells used her fictitious company, Kim's Cleaning Inc., to apply for PPP loans from Itria Ventures LLC, an online commercial lending platform based in New Jersey. In her loan applications, Wells falsely claimed her business posted gross annual receipts of more than \$600,000 and maintained an average monthly payroll of more than \$19,000. In reality, Wells' company existed in name only and had no employees.

As a result of her misrepresentations, in February 2021, Itria disbursed nearly \$49,000 in PPP funds to Wells. Wells in turn used the funds to pay for various personal expenses, including travel and gambling. Between July 2020 and May 2021, Wells also submitted three fraudulent EIDL applications that were denied by SBA.

On November 11, 2021, a federal grand jury in Portland returned a three-count indictment charging Wells with wire fraud.

Wells faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine and three years of supervised release. She will be sentenced on August 8, 2022 before U.S. District Court Judge Michael H. Simon.

As part of her plea agreement, Wells has agreed to pay \$51,457 in restitution to Itria and SBA.

U.S. Attorney Scott Erik Asphaug of the District of Oregon made the announcement.

This case was investigated by the U.S. Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA), the SBA Office of Inspector General, and the FBI. Assistant U.S. Attorney Ryan W. Bounds is prosecuting the case.

Anyone with information about allegations of attempted fraud involving COVID-19 can report it by calling the Justice Department's National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

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