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NINE DEFENDANTS PLEAD GUILTY IN DISASTER RELIEF SCHEME; ORDERED TO MAKE RESTITUTION

Defendants Submitted Applications on Behalf of Fake and Defunct Companies Claiming Hardship Due to COVID-19, Transferred Business Loan Funds to Personal Accounts and Wired Portion of Money to Accomplices

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz and New York State Inspector General Lucy Lang announced that nine defendants pleaded guilty to stealing thousands of dollars in pandemic relief funds intended to help small business owners suffering hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of the plea, the defendants have been ordered to make restitution payments totaling more than \$1 million.

District Attorney Katz said: "These nine defendants admitted to stealing thousands of dollars in state funds intended to support struggling businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The funds were critical to helping New Yorkers survive an unprecedented crisis. As part of their guilty pleas, the defendants are now required to make restitution. I thank my office's Frauds Bureau and the New York State Inspector General's Office for their partnership in holding them accountable."

New York State Inspector General Lucy Lang said: "Exploiting disaster relief funds for personal gain is both criminal and shameful at any time, but particularly during a global health crisis. Thank you to the dedicated team in my office, District Attorney Katz and her colleagues, and our law enforcement partners for securing today's guilty pleas and million dollar recovery of taxpayer money. New York will not stand for putting greed above the public good."

The nine defendants pleaded guilty on various dates between May 2025 and February 2026, to grand larceny in the fourth degree and petit larceny in Queens Supreme Court and were ordered to make restitution payments totaling \$1,091,720, \$760,000 of which has already been remitted to New York State. (**SEE ADDENDUM**)

DA Katz said that, according to the investigation, beginning around June 2020, each of the nine defendants submitted multiple applications for the New York State Empire Development Pandemic Small Business Recovery Grant Program on behalf of numerous small business corporations.

Each loan applicant certified that the funds were needed to cover business expenses such as payroll, commercial rent/mortgage payments, utilities and/or supplies. Most of the loan money received by the defendants was almost immediately transferred into their personal bank accounts.

An extensive review of business bank records associated with the nine defendants and the corporations involved did not indicate any business activity prior to receiving the grant proceeds and did not reflect any revenue or expenses listed on the tax returns submitted with the original grant applications.

The New York State Inspector General began the investigation into the misuse of loan funds and referred the case to the Queens District Attorney's Office in May 2024.

Upon learning of the charges pending against them, the defendants separately surrendered to the Queens District Attorney's office between May 6 and May 9, 2025.

The investigation was conducted by the Queens District Attorney's Office in close collaboration with members of the New York State Office of the Inspector General, including Investigative Counsel Ray Gdula, Senior Investigator Ilene Gates, Chief of Audit for the Downstate Region Alla Korsunskiy, Senior Investigative Auditor Angelus Okeke, and Investigative Auditors Kirsys Acevedo and Iraj Zia, under the supervision of Deputy Inspector General for the New York City Region Ken Michaels.

Crucial assistance was provided by the NYPD Squad assigned to the Queens District Attorney's office, including Detective Erin Currie, retired Detective Anthony Rodriguez and Sergeant Thomas Rouse, under the overall supervision of Lieutenant Christopher Kehoe.

Assistant District Attorney Talia Vogel, Section Chief in the District Attorney's Frauds Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Hana C. Kim, Deputy Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Joseph T. Conley III.

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ADDENDUM

The following defendants pleaded guilty and were ordered to make restitution:

MAHBUB MALIK, 41, of Astoria, Queens County, pleaded guilty to grand larceny in the fourth degree and received a three-year conditional discharge.

TUFAIL AHMED, 50, of Jamaica, Queens County.

YOUSUF MD, 45, of Elmhurst, Queens County.

MOHAMMED CHOWDHURY, AKA KHOKAN ASHRAF, 68, of Jackson Heights, Queens County.

NADEEM SHEIKH, 56, of New Hyde Park, Nassau County.

ZAKIR CHOWDHURY, 59, of Jamaica, Queens County.

MOHAMMAD KHAN, 49, of Jamaica Hills, Queens County.

TANVIR MILON, 55, of Farmingdale, Nassau County.

JUNED KHAN, 56, of Suffolk County.

Note to Editors: Archived press releases are available at www.queensda.org.

