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New Task Force Targets Paycheck Protection Program Fraud

The State Attorney's Office has started a new task force to target fraudsters who cheated the federal Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) out of billions of dollars.

Just a month after starting, task force investigators already are working on 21 cases referred by federal authorities, plus information on six additional cases from public tips. It amounts to over \$12 million in fraudulent loans. And much more will be uncovered and prosecuted in state court.

Under the PPP, small businesses struggling financially from the COVID-19 pandemic received billions of dollars in forgivable loans to pay employee salaries and expenses. But a number of individuals across the country used it as a money grab, pretending to run businesses needing help with payroll expenses, interest on mortgages and rent and utilities.

Our PPP Fraud Task Force brings together the combined efforts of the State Attorney's Office and the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office to investigate and bring violators to justice with prison terms. "PPP money was easy to get and became a recipe for fraud," State Attorney Dave Aronberg said.

The new task force aspires to follow the success of the Palm Beach County Sober Homes Task Force, which over the past seven years has targeted and eliminated widespread fraud and abuse in the local drug treatment industry. That work has led to 123 arrests and 111 convictions so far.

Six investigators are working on PPP fraud cases, gathering evidence for felony charges such as scheme to defraud, grand theft and money laundering.

"I think there are a lot of people who thought they got away with it," Aronberg said. "They're driving around in their fancy cars funded by taxpayer dollars from the PPP. The gravy train is over, and we're coming after you."

Have a tip for our task force? Please call the Tip Line: 1-844-324-5463