



John A. Carey
Inspector General

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL PALM BEACH COUNTY



Inspector General
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**Redacted per §119.071(5)(b) and (5)(f)1F.S., and 15 and
U.S.C. §9058a (4)(A)**

Investigative Report

2022-0014

False Information on Palm Beach County Rental Assistance Program Applications- West Palm Beach July 17, 2024



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INVESTIGATIVE REPORT 2022-0014

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FALSE INFORMATION ON PALM BEACH COUNTY RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM APPLICATIONS- WEST PALM BEACH

SUMMARY

WHAT WE DID

The Palm Beach County (County) Office of Inspector General (OIG) received a complaint from the County Community Services Department (Community Services) concerning [REDACTED] (Applicant)'s applications to the County Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act – Coronavirus Relief Fund Rental, Utilities, and Food Assistance Program and Emergency Rental Assistance program. Community Services alleged Applicant submitted false employment documentation with his applications, which resulted in his purported landlord, Antonio Silva (Mr. Silva), inappropriately receiving \$4,455.00.

Based upon our initial review of Applicant's applications and accompanying documents, the OIG initiated an investigation of the following allegation:

Allegation (1): Antonio Silva provided false information to the County in support of rental assistance applications submitted in Applicant's name, which resulted in an improper rental assistance payment to Mr. Silva.

Our office reviewed rental assistance applications, supporting documents,

Antonio Silva engaged in a deliberate scheme to defraud the County. He successfully defrauded the County of over \$5,000 and attempted over \$29,000 in additional fraud.

financial records, and the program guidelines. We interviewed Mr. Silva and individuals with knowledge of information contained in documents submitted in support of the rental assistance applications submitted in Applicant's name, and attempted to interview Applicant and a second purported landlord (Landlord 2).

WHAT WE FOUND

Allegation (1) is supported. We found that Antonio Silva submitted false information to the County in support of rental assistance applications submitted in Applicant's name, which resulted in improper rental assistance payment to Mr. Silva.

The County issued payment of \$4,455.00 to Mr. Silva. In addition, the County issued Applicant \$900.00 in food assistance. The

inappropriate payments resulted in Identified Costs¹ of **\$5,355.00**.

We also found that Mr. Silva provided false information to the County in an unsuccessful attempt to inappropriately obtain \$29,300.00 in County assistance monies with a second rental assistance application in Applicant's name.

We did not find sufficient evidence to conclude that Applicant or purported Landlord 2 submitted, benefitted from, or had knowledge of these applications.

We found sufficient information to warrant referring our findings regarding Mr. Silva to law enforcement (with a copy to the State Attorney's Office).

We also found sufficient information to warrant notification of our findings to the United States Attorney's Office for a determination of whether they constitute a violation of United States Criminal Code.

This Report will also be referred to jurisdictions outside of Palm Beach County that may have independently issued assistance funding to Mr. Silva.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

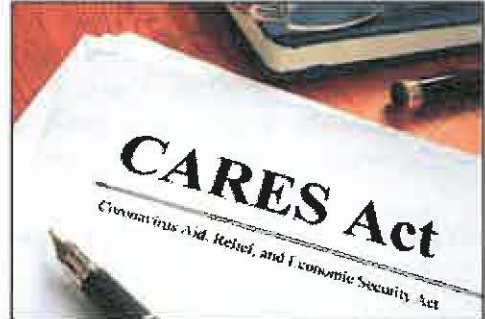
We make one recommendation: that the County seek reimbursement of \$5,355.00 in inappropriately issued funds.

¹ Identified costs are costs that have been identified as dollars that have the potential of being returned to the entity to offset the taxpayers' burden.

BACKGROUND

The CARES Act

On March 1, 2020, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis directed the State Health Officer to issue a public health emergency in the State of Florida due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 13, 2020, then-Palm Beach County Mayor Dave Kerner declared a state of emergency in the County due to COVID-19.



On March 27, 2020, the President signed the CARES Act into law. The CARES Act allocated \$2.2 trillion in economic relief to individuals, businesses, and governments affected by COVID-19. State governments were allocated a total of \$139 billion based on their populations (as measured by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2019), with no state receiving less than \$1.25 billion. Florida received a total of \$8.328 billion, with \$261,174,832 of that total provided to Palm Beach County.

On May 15, 2020, the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners dedicated \$40 million of the approximately \$261 million allocated to it for "Emergency Mortgage, Rental and Utility Assistance." Community Services administered the Rental Assistance portion of this funding.

CARES Act - Coronavirus Relief Fund Rental, Utilities, and Food Assistance Program Guidelines

The CARES Act - Coronavirus Relief Fund Rental, Utilities, and Food Assistance Program was designed to utilize CARES Act funds to provide one-time rental and utility assistance to eligible County residents who experienced loss of income, reduction in hours, or unemployment as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Community Services website explained that in order to be eligible for the program, the applicant must reside within the corporate limits of Palm Beach County and have documentable information to evidence loss of income, reduction in hours, or unemployment because of the COVID-19 pandemic, that contributed to missed rental payments and/or utility payments. Eligibility guidelines on the website also listed the income and asset requirements to qualify for the program. Assistance was provided for past due rent and/or utilities due from March 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020.

Emergency Rental Assistance Program

According to the Community Services website, on March 9, 2021, under the authority of the U.S. Department of Treasury Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) Program 1 (as established by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021) and 2 (as established by section 3201 of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021), the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) approved ERA-1 funding "to provide **Palm Beach**

County residents” affected by COVID-19 with rental and utility assistance. On August 17, 2021, the BCC approved ERA-2 funding for the same purpose.

“Eligible **Palm Beach County households** is a renter household in which one or more individuals meets all of the following criteria”:

- For ERA-1, qualifies for unemployment or experienced a reduction of household income, incurred significant costs, or experienced other financial hardships **due to** COVID-19 (either directly or indirectly), or for ERA-2, qualifies for unemployment or experienced other financial hardships **during or due to** (either directly or indirectly) COVID-19;
- Demonstrates a risk of homelessness or housing instability; and
- Has a household income at or below 80% of the area median.

Rental Assistance Applications

The County accepted applications electronically on the Community Services Online System for Community Access to Resources and Social Services (OSCARSS). OSCARSS required applicants to upload certain supporting documentation, including identification, a rental lease agreement, and a Balance Statement from the landlord. The Balance Statement was to be completed by the applicant’s landlord or property manager, and was to reflect the amount of rent owed by the applicant.



The form of the application differed slightly throughout the program, but each included eligibility questions and acknowledgements. Applicants were required to affirm these statements by electronically checking a box next to each one.

The Acknowledgement section for applications Nos. 28043 and 98615 included the following:

I further certify that I have read² the above information and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the information is accurate and has been properly recorded. Additionally, I understand that I am responsible for the accuracy of the information provided and that said information will be used as a basis for determining my eligibility for services. **I also understand that any falsification or misrepresentation of this information is just cause for denial of services and prosecution for fraud.** [Emphasis added]

² In the version of this acknowledgment for application 28043, there was a comma after the word “read.” The rest of this acknowledgment was identical for both applications.

The final page of the application required the applicant's printed name and submission date.

Community Services assigned applications it received to a Community Services reviewer. The reviewer checked to ensure the applicant submitted all required information and that there were no discrepancies within the documents. If information was missing, or if information in submitted documents was inconsistent, the reviewer would return the application to the applicant, noting what was missing or inconsistent. If the applicant met the income guidelines, submitted required documentation, and the applicant's landlord had registered or was in the process of registering with the County as a vendor, the reviewer would send the application to a supervisor for review.

Then, applications were sent to Community Services fiscal personnel. Upon the approval of an application for rental assistance, the County sent notice of approval and a request for payment to the County Clerk & Comptroller's Office for payment processing.

800 Hank Aaron Drive, Apt. [REDACTED], West Palm Beach, Florida

Rental assistance application No. 98615 listed 800 Hank Aaron Drive, Apt. [REDACTED], West Palm Beach, FL 33401 as the residential address for the Applicant. Palm Beach County Property Appraiser's records reflect that 800 Hank Aaron Drive, West Palm Beach is the location of the Cameron Estates housing community. The property has been owned by Aaron Drive Holdings LLC since April 2011.



[REDACTED], Orlando, Florida

Rental assistance application No. 28043 listed [REDACTED] as the residential address for the Applicant. The Orange County, Florida Property Appraiser's online database shows that since March 2020, neither Mr. Silva nor the Applicant owned that residential single-family home. There is no [REDACTED] associated with this address.

ALLEGATIONS AND FINDINGS

Allegation (1):

Antonio Silva submitted false information to the County in support of rental assistance applications submitted in the Applicant's name, which resulted in an improper rental assistance payment to Mr. Silva.

Governing Directives:

Palm Beach County CARES Act- Coronavirus Relief Fund Rental, Utilities, and Food Assistance Program application and program guidelines; Emergency Rental Assistance Program application and program guidelines.

Finding:

The information obtained **supports** the allegation.

Applicant's Rental Assistance Application No. 28043

County records show rental assistance application no. 28043 seeking rental and food assistance was electronically signed and submitted to the County on behalf of Applicant on August 10, 2020. Applicant's residential address was listed as [REDACTED], Orlando, Florida 32807. The application listed Antonio J. Silva as Applicant's landlord, and also listed [REDACTED], Orlando, Florida as Mr. Silva's address.³ The application stated that Applicant's monthly rental amount was \$1,450.00 per month, and requested \$5,800 in past due rent for April 2020 through July 2020. A social security card, a driver's license in the name "[REDACTED]"⁴, a Florida "Determination Notice of Unemployment Compensation Claim Filed" form, and a layoff letter for Applicant and a Residential Lease Agreement between Applicant and Mr. Silva were submitted with the application. The layoff letter and Residential Lease Agreement listed Applicant's address as 800 Hank Aaron Drive, [REDACTED], West Palm Beach, FL and the driver's license had the same address, but with no unit listed. The OIG's background check for Applicant did not associate him with this address or the social security number on the social security card submitted with the application.

The Landlord Balance Statement submitted with this application was electronically signed with Mr. Silva's name and listed Applicant's address as 800 Hank Aaron Dr., West Palm Beach, FL 33401 (no unit number). The statement listed past due rent for April 2020 through June 2020, for a total of \$4,350.

³ The landlord's address did not include a unit number. An out of County address listed for the tenant on the application and the inconsistency between the tenant's address on the application and the attachments should have prompted further review by the County since the eligibility requirements specified that County funding was approved for *Palm Beach County residents*.

⁴ An OIG check with law enforcement showed that the submitted driver's license corresponded with the true driver's license number for "[REDACTED]" not "[REDACTED]". Law enforcement stated that the license not only had the name alteration, but also altered the address from an address in Orlando, Florida to that of 800 Hank Aaron Drive in West Palm Beach.

Landlord's Balance Statement

Tenants Name : Roberto J Cebessa Vega
 Tenants Address : [REDACTED] FL 33401

	Month	Rent Due	Late Fee	Total Due
Month 1	April	\$1,450.00	\$0.00	\$1,450.00
Month 2	May	\$1,450.00	\$0.00	\$1,450.00
Month 3	June	\$1,450.00	\$0.00	\$1,450.00
Grand Total :				\$4,350.00

Antonio J. Silva
 Electronically signed By
 08/27/2020
 Date

The completed "Eligibility Questions" submitted with the application stated that Applicant was a resident of Palm Beach County and that he had a loss of employment or reduction in work hours after March 13, 2020:

Eligibility Questions

Are you a Palm Beach County Resident?
Yes

Were you Current on your Bills prior to COVID-19 Crisis (March 2020)?
Yes

Were you Employed or Self-Employed prior to COVID-19 Crisis (March 2020)?
Yes

Are you currently a client of Community Services?
No

Have you received any subsidy or assistance for Rental or Utilities from another Entity?
No

Did you lose your job or did you have a reduction in hours worked after March 13, 2020?
Yes

Did you lose your Self-Employment Business or did you have a significant decrease in your customers after March 13, 2020?
Yes

Did you apply for Unemployment or did you start receiving Unemployment after March 13, 2020?
Yes

Are you able to provide Documents to verify your Employment Status and Unemployment Claim stated above?
Yes

Email Addresses Associated with Application 28043

Application No. 28043 lists a primary contact phone number of [REDACTED] and the email address for the Applicant as [REDACTED]. The application identified Mr. Silva's email address as usatravelfun14@aol.com.⁵ However, the records obtained from the OIG's background checks link the [REDACTED] email address to the purported landlord, Mr. Silva, not the Applicant, as asserted in the application.

⁵ The OIG did not find any user identification information for this email address.

Employment Verification for Application No. 28043

The supporting documents submitted with application No. 28043 included a layoff letter dated March 17, 2020 purporting to be from the Marriott Hotel Group. The letter had a Marriott West Palm Beach logo, but did not include a street address or phone number for the company. The letter was purportedly signed by the company's Regional General Manager Michael Baccara and listed Jackie Gomes as a Marriott point of contact. The layoff letter was directed to Applicant at 800 Hank Aaron Drive [REDACTED], W. Palm Beach, FL, and stated that Applicant was laid off due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**OIG Interview of Rachel Castillo, West Palm Beach Marriott Director of Human Resources**

Ms. Castillo told the OIG that the Marriott letter submitted with application No. 28043 was "fraudulent." She said the company did not have employees on March 17, 2020 named Jackie Gomes nor Michael Baccara. She further stated Applicant never worked for the company.

Applicant's Unemployment Form

Applicant's application No. 28043 included a Florida "Determination Notice of Unemployment Compensation Claim Filed" form:

DETERMINATION NOTICE OF UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION CLAIM FILED Document ID: 201117900341

3333301631 0612131 0000000 0 000 00000 000000 000000 0000 0000

EMPLOYER NUMBER: 000000004 LOC CODE: [REDACTED] CITY: [REDACTED] STATE: FL

EMP DATE OF CLAIM: 06/12/20

~ CHARGEABLE ~

AVAILABLE CREDITS: [REDACTED]

WEEKLY BENEFIT AMOUNT: \$284.00

***** TO RESPOND USING THE INTERNET, GO TO WWW.FLUIDNOW.COM/AENR *****

800 Hank Aaron Dr [REDACTED]
W. Palm Beach, FL 33401

PLEASE COMPLETE THE APPROPRIATE SECTIONS BELOW. PROVIDE ALL INFORMATION THAT IS APPLICABLE TO THIS INDIVIDUAL. See important information on the reverse side.

☐ A. This worker was entitled to the following payments, which are applicable to any period after the EMP DATE OF CLAIM shown above:

TYPE OF PAY	AMOUNT	FROM	TO	AVERAGE WEEKLY WAGE	TYPE OF PAY	AMOUNT	FROM	TO
SEVERANCE					RETIREMENT			
GOODWILL					DISABILITY			
WAGES IN LIEU OF NOTICE					REASONABLE ACCRUAL			

☒ B. Laid off due to lack of work (date: 03/17/2020 (pandemic furlough)) * Select if pay order would date:

☐ C. The worker was discharged on (date): [REDACTED] (See) [REDACTED] for cause REMARKS:

See below to give details of the reason for discharge checked below:

☐ 1. Inability to perform work or satisfactory work performance (not connected to worker's worker never performed satisfactorily)

☐ 2. Misconduct as the result of (a) worker's failure to follow company policies or rules; (b) worker's failure to follow the discharge; if the worker received any warnings, give the dates and reasons

☐ 3. Unsatisfactory job performance during a satisfactory period of employment (not during employment probationary period of which the worker was notified during the first 90 days)

☐ 4. The worker was discharged due to (a) [REDACTED] (b) [REDACTED] (c) [REDACTED] (d) [REDACTED] (e) [REDACTED] (f) [REDACTED] (g) [REDACTED] (h) [REDACTED] (i) [REDACTED] (j) [REDACTED] (k) [REDACTED] (l) [REDACTED] (m) [REDACTED] (n) [REDACTED] (o) [REDACTED] (p) [REDACTED] (q) [REDACTED] (r) [REDACTED] (s) [REDACTED] (t) [REDACTED] (u) [REDACTED] (v) [REDACTED] (w) [REDACTED] (x) [REDACTED] (y) [REDACTED] (z) [REDACTED]

☐ E. The worker was suspended from [REDACTED] to [REDACTED]

☐ F. The worker is on a leave of absence from [REDACTED] to [REDACTED]

☐ G. The worker refused an offer to work for (date) [REDACTED] to [REDACTED] (a) [REDACTED] (b) [REDACTED] (c) [REDACTED] (d) [REDACTED] (e) [REDACTED] (f) [REDACTED] (g) [REDACTED] (h) [REDACTED] (i) [REDACTED] (j) [REDACTED] (k) [REDACTED] (l) [REDACTED] (m) [REDACTED] (n) [REDACTED] (o) [REDACTED] (p) [REDACTED] (q) [REDACTED] (r) [REDACTED] (s) [REDACTED] (t) [REDACTED] (u) [REDACTED] (v) [REDACTED] (w) [REDACTED] (x) [REDACTED] (y) [REDACTED] (z) [REDACTED]

☐ H. The worker was employed by an educational institution

☐ I. The worker has a written offer, or implied understanding to return to [REDACTED] (a) [REDACTED] (b) [REDACTED] (c) [REDACTED] (d) [REDACTED] (e) [REDACTED] (f) [REDACTED] (g) [REDACTED] (h) [REDACTED] (i) [REDACTED] (j) [REDACTED] (k) [REDACTED] (l) [REDACTED] (m) [REDACTED] (n) [REDACTED] (o) [REDACTED] (p) [REDACTED] (q) [REDACTED] (r) [REDACTED] (s) [REDACTED] (t) [REDACTED] (u) [REDACTED] (v) [REDACTED] (w) [REDACTED] (x) [REDACTED] (y) [REDACTED] (z) [REDACTED]

REMARKS—Include any explanations you feel will help us make a determination on this claim, including other reasons for discharge and reason for suspension or leave of absence. Use the reverse side of this form if more space is needed.

We have told employees that 80% of the total's expenditures shall due to the pandemic. We don't expect to be able to bring the majority of the staff back until January 2021. -HR Manager (Marriott West Palm Beach)

Section 443.071 of the Florida Unemployment Compensation Law provides penalties for making false statements or failing to disclose material facts to prevent or reduce payment of benefits to otherwise entitled individuals.

CONTACT PERSON'S NAME - Please Print: Mariah Delgado Date: 06/12/2020

COMPANY TITLE OF CONTACT PERSON: HR MANAGER Phone Number: (561)214-5712

EMAIL ADDRESS OF CONTACT PERSON: mdelgado@marriott.com

Job Site Address, if different from mailing address: [REDACTED]





CEO Form UCB 412 (Rev. 7/5/17) Pub 0200 3 416 & 0000 3 929

The unemployment determination claim form submitted shows Applicant's name; address as 800 Hank Aaron Dr. [REDACTED], W. Palm Beach, FL; a partially redacted social security number; and an employer number. The form contained a checked box that stated that Applicant was "Laid off due to a lack of work 3/17/2020 (pandemic furlough)." The form listed the employer's contact person as "Mariah Delgado, HR Manager" at Marriott.

According to Manage Review Specialist Barbara Hyde of the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, the unemployment determination form submitted with Applicant's application is a falsified document.

Payment to Antonio Joseph Silva

On August 31, 2020, the County issued check number 00003200446 in the amount of \$4,455.00 to Antonio Joseph Silva as the landlord for Applicant. This payment included requested late fees. This check was mailed to Mr. Silva at [REDACTED] and deposited into Mr. Silva's bank account on September 8, 2020.

 BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS PALM BEACH COUNTY WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA		91-975/612 WELLS FARGO BANK, N.A.	CHECK NO DATE	00003200446 08/31/2020
PAY TO THE ORDER OF ANTONIO JOSEPH SILVA		AMOUNT \$*****4,455.00		Four Thousand Four Hundred Fifty Five And 00/100 Dollars
SIGNATURE OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS 				
THIS DOCUMENT IS PRINTED IN TWO COLORED INKS. NOT ACCEPTABLE UNLESS BLUE AND BLACK INKS PRESENT IN BLOCK LETTERS. FEATURES ON BACK:				
				
THE SECURITY OF THIS CARD IS GUARANTEED BY THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS. IF THE CARD IS LOST OR STOLEN, THE CARDHOLDER MUST IMMEDIATELY REPORT IT TO THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS.		1356026 ENCLOSURE NAME 		

Per the OSCARSS review log, the County sent a food assistance card with a \$400.00 balance to the purported tenant, Applicant, at [REDACTED], Orlando, FL 32807, instead of 800 Hank Aaron Blvd. [REDACTED], West Palm Beach, FL, on September 16, 2020. On January 7, 2021, the County added a payment of \$500.00 to that card.

This food card was used for the following unallowable, non-food expenses:

- Nintendo video game company: \$58.57
- Orlando Sentinel Communications: \$16.42
- Alphalete Athletics clothing company: \$83.95
- Old Navy clothing company: \$171.89
- Sernes clothing company: \$70.24
- Out Magazine: \$29.95
- Foot Locker clothing and sporting goods: \$99.99

Mr. Silva's Vendor Registration

To receive rental assistance payments, the County required landlords to register as vendors. Mr. Silva registered as a County vendor on August 22, 2020, five days prior to the submission of application 28043. In Mr. Silva's vendor registration, he lists his name as Antonio J. Silva, his email address as usatravelfun14@aol.com, and his telephone number as (321) 460-0143.

The OIG obtained from the County Purchasing Department a copy of the W-9 submitted when Mr. Silva registered as a vendor for the purpose of receiving funds as Applicant's landlord. The W-9 contained Mr. Silva's social security number and listed his address as [REDACTED]. As part of its review process, the County verified that this social security number belonged to Mr. Silva. The last four digits of the social security number on Mr. Silva's W-9 match the last four digits in a background search on Mr. Silva conducted by the OIG.

Form W-9
(Rev. October 2018)
Department of the Treasury
Internal Revenue Service

Request for Taxpayer Identification Number and Certification
Go to www.irs.gov/FormW9 for instructions and the latest information.

Give Form to the requester. Do not send to the IRS.

1. Name (as shown on your income tax return). Name is required on this line; do not leave this line blank.
ANTONIO J. SILVA

2. Business name/disregarded entity name, if different from above

3. Check appropriate box for federal tax classification of the person whose name is entered on line 1. Check only one of the following seven boxes.

☒ Individual/sole proprietor or single-member LLC

☐ C Corporation

☐ S Corporation

☐ Partnership

☐ Trust/estate

☐ Limited liability company. Enter the tax classification (C=C corporation, S=S corporation, P=Partnership) in the space below the box: _____

Note: Check the appropriate box in the line above for the tax classification of the single-member owner. Do not check LLC if the LLC is classified as a single-member LLC that is disregarded from the owner unless the owner of the LLC is another LLC that is not disregarded from the owner for U.S. federal tax purposes. Otherwise, a single-member LLC that is disregarded from the owner should check the appropriate box for the tax classification of its owner.

4. Exemption code (codes apply only to certain entities, not individuals; see instructions on page 3):

Exempt payee code (if any): _____

Exemption from FATCA reporting code (if any): _____

(Applies to accounts maintained outside the U.S.)

5. See instructions.

Requester's name and address (optional): _____

Applicant's Lease with Mr. Silva

The Residential Lease Agreement submitted with application No. 28043 between Applicant and Antonio J. Silva (AJS Property Management) stated that Mr. Silva owned 800 Hank Aaron Dr. [REDACTED], W. Palm Beach, FL 33401 and that he wished to lease the property to Applicant.

[REDACTED] appears on the lease for the rental address on Hank Aaron Blvd. in West Palm Beach; whereas, the rental address on application No. 28043 lists the rental address as [REDACTED] in Orlando.

The lease shows that the agreement was entered into on October 12, 2020, but that the lease term was from October 15, 2019 to October 15, 2020.

Residential Lease Agreement

THIS LEASE AGREEMENT (hereinafter referred to as the "Agreement") made and entered into this 12th day of October, 2019, by and between Antonio J. Silva (AJS Property Management) (hereinafter referred to as "Lessor") and [REDACTED] (hereinafter referred to as "Lessee").

WITNESSETH:

WHEREAS, Lessor is the fee owner of certain real property being lying and situate in West Palm Beach, Florida such real property having a street address of 800 Hank Aaron Dr, West Palm Beach, FL 33401

WHEREAS, Lessor is desirous of leasing the Premises to Lessee upon the terms and conditions as contained herein; and

WHEREAS, Lessee is desirous of leasing the Premises from Lessor on the terms and conditions as contained herein;

NOW, THEREFORE, for and in consideration of the sum of \$75 DOLLARS (\$75.00), the covenants and obligations contained herein and other good and valuable consideration, the receipt and sufficiency of which is hereby acknowledged, the parties hereto hereby agree as follows:

1. **TERM.** Lessor leases to Lessee and Lessee leases from Lessor the above described Premises together with any and all appurtenances thereto, for a term of 1 year(s), such term beginning on 10/15/19, and ending at 12 o'clock midnight on 10/15/2020
2. **RENT.** The total rent for the term hereof is the sum of FOURTEEN HUNDRED FIFTY DOLLARS (\$ 1450.00) payable on the 3rd day of each month of the term, in equal installments of FOURTEEN HUNDRED FIFTY DOLLARS (\$ 1450.00) first installment to be paid upon the due execution of this Agreement, the second installment to be paid on 11/3/2019. All such payments shall be made to Lessor at Lessor's address as set forth in the preamble to this Agreement on or before the due date and without demand.
3. **USE OF PREMISES.** The Premises shall be used and occupied by Lessee and Lessee's immediate family, consisting of [REDACTED] exclusively as a private single family.

The lease was purportedly signed by Applicant and Mr. Silva on October 12, 2019.

As to Lessor this 12th day of October, 2019

Executed in the presence of:

Witness:

Miranda Renaud 10 / 12 / 19
(Signature of witness) (date)

Lessor:

[REDACTED] 10 / 12 / 19
(Signature of Lessor) (date)

Lessee:

Antonio J. Silva,
Antonio J. Silva 10 / 12 / 19
(Signature of Lessee) (date)

OIG Review of Antonio J. Silva's Bank Records

Bank records for Mr. Silva listed his mailing address as [REDACTED]. The telephone number associated with his account is (321) 460-0143, the same telephone number associated with Mr. Silva's County vendor registration. The social security account number for this bank account also matches the social security number submitted with Mr. Silva's County vendor registration. The records show that on September 8, 2020, the check totaling \$4,455.00 from the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners was deposited into his account.⁶

REMOTE DEPOSIT TICKET	
CHECKING	
Deposit amount: 4455.00	
⑈5 10 100 295- [REDACTED]	⑈ 20 ,⑈0000445500,⑈

SPOONFEED HERE

1356026

Dustin Miller

DO NOT WRITE STRIP OR SIGN BELOW THIS LINE
NUMBER FOR TRACKING THE FIDUCIARY

⁶ Mr. Silva's bank records also show receipt of funds from the City of Austin, Texas (\$9,900.00), the State of Montana (\$26,450.00), the State of New York (\$29,250.00), Pinellas County, Florida (\$5,000.00), and Orange County, Florida (\$4,000.00). The OIG will refer this Report to these government entities.

OIG Interview of Stephanie Gauthier, Property Manager of Cameron Estates

Ms. Gauthier stated that the address for Cameron Estates is 800 Hank Aaron Drive, but that apartments have individually numbered addresses. She said that there is no "[REDACTED]"

Ms. Gauthier stated neither Applicant nor Mr. Silva ever resided in the complex and that the apartments in the complex are not individually owned by anyone, including Mr. Silva.

Ms. Gauthier was shown the lease submitted with Applicant's first application, and said it is not a lease type used by Cameron Estates. Ms. Gauthier further stated that the monthly rent for Cameron Estates during the time period of the purported lease agreement was \$2,375.00, in contrast to the monthly rent of \$1,450.00 listed on Applicant's lease submitted with application No. 28043.

OIG Interview of Christina Colon, Current Property Manager of Cameron Estates

Ms. Colon is the current Cameron Estates Property Manager and stated she has access to all systems that identify current and former tenants and employees.

Ms. Colon stated that there has never been a Cameron Estates tenant by the name of [REDACTED] or any variation of that name. She said there has never been a tenant, employee, or property manager/landlord by the name of Antonio J. Silva.

Ms. Colon was shown the lease submitted with this application of Applicant. She stated that the lease does not resemble the legitimate leases for Cameron Estates.

OIG Interviews of Antonio J. Silva

On April 14, 2022, the OIG contacted Mr. Silva telephonically to arrange an interview. During this call, Mr. Silva told the OIG that he owns two properties and that one of them is a condominium located at 800 Hank Aaron Drive, West Palm Beach, Florida. Mr. Silva stated that he resides in Tampa, Florida. He agreed to be further interviewed via Zoom.

On October 26, 2022, Mr. Silva told the OIG that he did not understand how his name ended up on a Palm Beach County rental assistance application, as he has never been to Palm Beach County. Contradicting his comments to the OIG six months earlier, Mr. Silva said he did not own any property in West Palm Beach. He also stated that he did not know anyone by the last name "(Applicant's last name)." He said he did not receive a payment for rental assistance from the County. Mr. Silva also stated his one and only email address is [REDACTED]. Mr. Silva agreed to continue the interview on Zoom so that he could be shown records associated with the County applications. After the call ended, Mr. Silva did not respond to further OIG attempts to continue the interview.

Applicant's Rental Assistance Application No. 98615

County records show rental assistance application number 98615 was electronically signed and submitted to the County in Applicant's name on November 6, 2021. Application No. 98615 listed the same four digits for Applicant's social number, contact telephone number, and email address ([REDACTED]) that was listed in application No. 28043. The same driver's license and social security card submitted with application No. 28043 was also submitted with application No. 98615. Unlike in application No. 28043, for application 98615 Applicant's residential address was listed as 800 Hank Aaron Drive, [REDACTED] West Palm Beach, FL 33401. The application stated that Applicant's monthly rental payment was \$1,950.00, listed his landlord as Landlord 2, and provided that he had received a rental eviction notice and past due rent notice. The application listed Landlord 2's address as [REDACTED] - **the same address that had been provided in application No. 28043 for Mr. Silva.** Additionally, the application listed Landlord 2's email address as usatravelfun14@aol.com, **the same email address listed in application No. 28043 for Mr. Silva and in his County vendor registration.** Applicant's Rental Assistance Application No. 98615 requested \$29,300.00 for November 2020 through January 2022.⁷

In the Declaration of Crisis Section of this application, the application states:

Ever since April 2020 when I was furloughed by my employer due to the pandemic my life has been turned upside down both personally and financially. The little savings I did have I blew through fast with bills still coming in yet no income coming in. I ended up in the hospital for over 2 months with Covid and pneumonia. My landlord has been understanding but I know it's only so long she can wait.

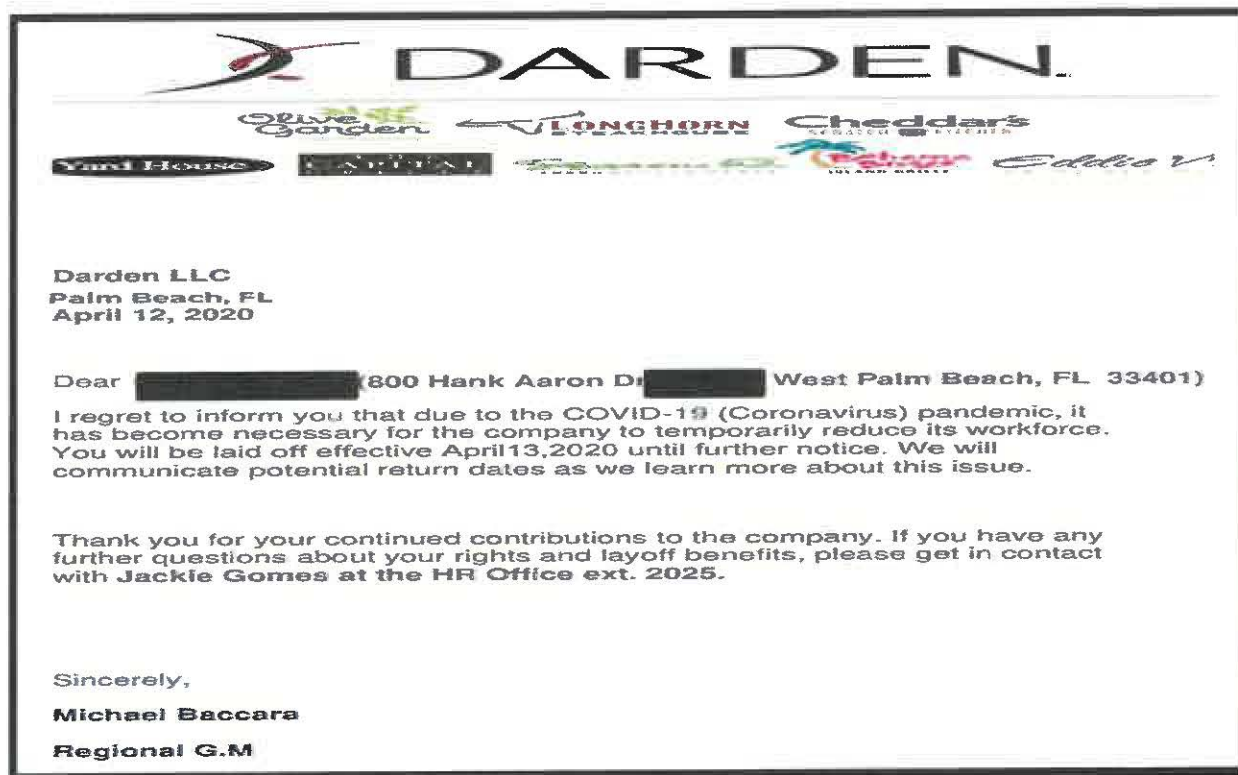
Declaration of Crisis (Please Explain the reason for your Crisis Situation below):

Ever since April 2020 when I was furloughed by my employer due to the pandemic my life has been turned upside down both personally and financially. The little savings I did have I blew through fast with bills still coming in yet no income coming in. I ended up in the hospital for over 2 months with Covid and pneumonia. My landlord has been understanding but I know it's only so long she can wait.

The supporting documents submitted with this application included a letter purporting to be from Darden LLC. The letter had a Darden logo, but the content of the letter exactly mirrored the language as the letter on Marriott letterhead that had been submitted with Applicant's application No. 28043. The letter dated April 12, 2020-- approximately a month after the Marriott West Palm Beach letter-- was directed to Applicant at 800 Hank Aaron Drive, [REDACTED] West Palm Beach, FL 33401, instead of [REDACTED], as provided in the Marriott West Palm Beach letter. Additionally, the letter was purported to be signed by Michael Baccara Regional G.M. and listed Jackie Gomes as the Human Resources

⁷ Mr. Silva's bank records show multiple Zelle payments made to Landlord 2 from Mr. Silva from May 17, 2021 through June 7, 2021 totaling \$4,390.00 and payments made to Mr. Silva from Landlord 2 from June 2, 2021 through March 9, 2022 totaling \$18,900.00.

contact, as provided in March 17, 2020 Marriott West Palm Beach letter, and again stated that Applicant was laid off due to COVID-19.



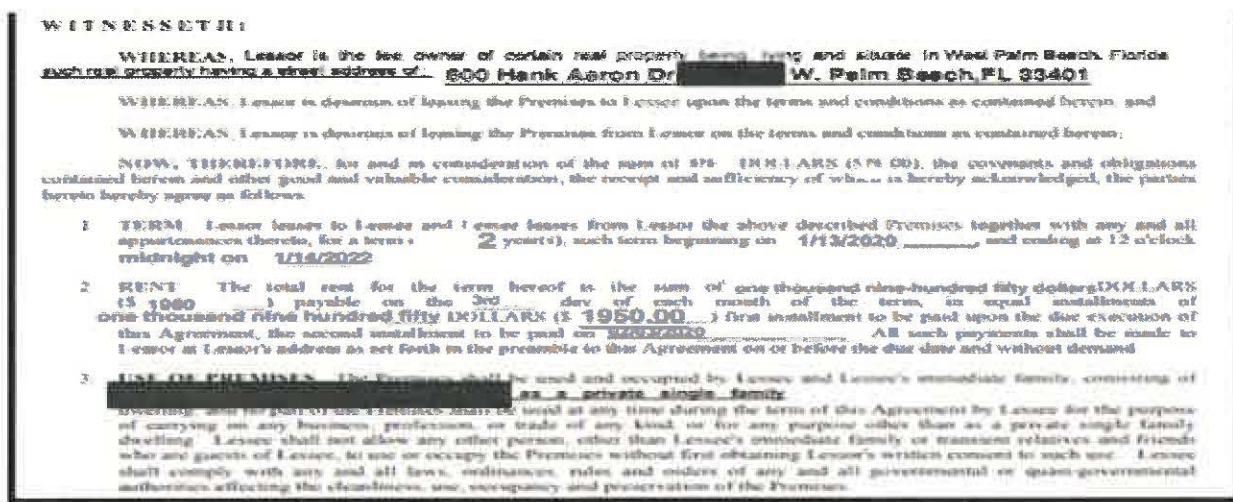
Information from Darden Associate Counsel Patricia Helman

The OIG provided the Darden Legal department with a copy of the employment letter used in application 98615. Ms. Helman, Associate Counsel for Darden Corporation, responded via email to the OIG that the letter purportedly on Darden's letterhead dated April 12, 2020 is "not valid." She stated there has never been a Darden employee named Jackie Gomes nor Michael Baccara. She further stated that "Regional G.M" is not a term that the company uses, that the letterhead is not a format that the company uses and "appears to be a very bad copy/paste with logos completely cut off," that the Darden address on the letter is incorrect, and that the company does not have a "Darden LLC" entity.

Ms. Helman said that Darden had one employee with the same name as Applicant, who worked at Capital Grill in Miami, Florida and was terminated in 2019, not in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She also stated that the company has had two employees by the name of Antonio Silva. One employee worked at Olive Garden in Orlando, Florida and was terminated in 2022, and the other employee worked at Red Lobster in Tampa, Florida and was terminated in 2007.

Lease Submitted with Second Application

A Residential Lease Agreement between Applicant (tenant) and Landlord 2 (Owner/landlord) was submitted with application No. 98615. The lease for 800 Hank Aaron Drive, [REDACTED], West Palm Beach, FL states that it is signed by Landlord 2 and Applicant. It is dated January 12, 2020, and is for the period of January 13, 2020 through January 14, 2022.



The County denied the application on November 7, 2021 with no funds issued. The County's application log notes that "...Client provided altered ID and Social Security Card..." The County determined based upon their appearance that the documents were altered.

OIG Interview of Christina Colon, Current Property Manager of Cameron Estates

Ms. Colon is the current Cameron Estates Property Manager and stated she has access to all systems that identify tenants and employees.

Ms. Colon stated that there has never been a Cameron Estates tenant, employee, or property manager/landlord by the name of Landlord 2.

Ms. Colon was shown the lease submitted with application No. 98615 of Applicant. She stated that the lease is not one used by Cameron Estates.

OIG Interview of Landlord 2

The OIG contacted Landlord 2 telephonically at [REDACTED] the telephone number listed for the landlord on application 98615. Landlord 2 told the OIG that she owns two properties in South Florida. The OIG asked Landlord 2 the addresses for those properties, but Landlord 2 would not answer and instead requested that the OIG email her⁸ so that

⁸ Landlord 2 supplied an email address to the OIG that was not on any submissions to the County.

she could verify the identity of the OIG investigator prior to disclosing information. Landlord 2 stated that she would call the OIG back after she received the email.

The OIG emailed Landlord 2, but she never called the OIG back. Landlord 2 did not answer subsequent phone calls from the OIG.

OIG Efforts to Establish Applicant's Identification Information

County records show rental assistance applications 28043 and 98615 included identification for Applicant in the form of a driver's license with an issuance date of February 7, 2013. The driver's license listed Applicant's address as 800 Hank Aaron Drive, West Palm Beach, FL.

Law enforcement informed the OIG that per their search of the Florida Department of Motor Vehicles database, an altered driver's license was provided in Applicant's rental assistance applications. According to DMV records, Applicant has never had a driver's license listing his address as 800 Hank Aaron Drive, West Palm Beach, Florida. DMV records and publicly available records indicated that Applicant's has resided in Orlando, FL since May of 2019.

OIG Review of Mr. Silva's Financial Transactions with Applicant

An OIG review of Mr. Silva's bank records showed no evidence of transactions of any kind between Mr. Silva and Applicant.

OIG Efforts to Contact Applicant

The OIG unsuccessfully attempted to contact Applicant at [REDACTED], the email address commonly associated with Applicant in public source searches, and attempted to contact Applicant on multiple phone numbers. There was no response from Applicant.

OIG Conclusion

There were two rental assistance applications submitted to the County in Applicant's name. Based upon our review of the applications and supporting documents, and the OIG interviews of individuals with knowledge of the information in such documents, we found that the leases, employment letters, Applicant's driver's license, and unemployment documents submitted to the County in support of the two applications were fabricated. We, however, found no information to support a finding that Applicant submitted these applications or was involved in their submission. Moreover, we did not find sufficient evidence to show that Applicant profited from or attempted to profit from these applications.

In both applications, Applicant's email address was listed as [REDACTED]. However, the records obtained from the OIG's background checks and the admission by the

purported landlord for application No. 28043, Mr. Silva, show that [REDACTED] is, in fact, Mr. Silva's email address. In addition, on both applications, the email address for Applicant's landlords (Mr. Silva and Landlord 2) was listed as usatravelfun14@aol.com. This email address was also listed as the landlord's email address in Mr. Silva's vendor registration documentation for application No. 28043, which included the same address, social security number, and phone number linked to Mr. Silva through his banking records and other publicly available information. Additionally, we found that although Mr. Silva registered as a vendor for the purpose of receiving payments as Applicant's landlord and received payment for application No. 28043, Mr. Silva did not own the rental property associated with that application.

When interviewed, Mr. Silva provided contradictory and inaccurate information to the OIG. He initially stated he owned the property located at 800 Hank Aaron Drive, West Palm Beach but later during his interview admitted he did not own any property in Palm Beach County. Mr. Silva also denied receiving any payment from the County. His bank records show he did in fact deposit a County check derived from Applicant's rental assistance application No. 28043.

A second application submitted in Applicant's name requested assistance of \$29,300.00 from the County. This application No. 98615, which listed Applicant's landlord as Landlord 2, also had multiple fictitious statements and supporting documents - many of them the same false statements and information as application No. 28043. Although Landlord 2 was listed as the landlord, she did not own the property subject to the rental application and never registered as a vendor with the County. The County did not fund this request.

Mr. Silva's bank records establish a financial relationship between Landlord 2 and Mr. Silva. We, however, found no information to support a finding that Landlord 2 submitted the application, provided false documentation in support of the application or vendor registration, or received any funds relating to a false application.

We found that purported landlord Antonio Silva falsely represented himself as Applicant's landlord to the County in support of rental assistance application No. 28043 submitted in Applicant's name, which resulted in improper rental assistance payments of \$4,455.00 to Mr. Silva. In addition, the County issued Applicant \$900.00 in food assistance, which was mailed to Mr. Silva's address. Those food cards had numerous unallowable expenses for non-food items. The total inappropriate payments resulted in Identified Costs of \$5,355.00.

Based upon our review of the information submitted with the two applications, and Mr. Silva's vendor registration, and information obtained from Mr. Silva's bank and other publicly available sources, we conclude that the evidence supports a finding that the application resulting in inappropriate payments to Mr. Silva and the application resulting in the County's denial of the request for \$29,300 were both more likely than not, actually submitted by Mr. Silva in order to improperly receive funding from the County's rental assistance program.

The allegation that Mr. Silva provided false information to County in support of Applicant's rental assistance applications is **supported**.

IDENTIFIED, QUESTIONED, AND AVOIDABLE COSTS

Identified Costs: \$5,355.00

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Inspector General's Investigations Division would like to thank the Palm Beach County Community Services Department staff for their cooperation throughout this investigation.

RECOMMENDED CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

The OIG recommends that the County seek reimbursement of \$5,355.00 of inappropriately issued funds.

RESPONSE FROM MANAGEMENT

Pursuant to Article XII, Section 2-427 of the Palm Beach County Code, Community Services was provided the opportunity to submit a written explanation or rebuttal to the findings as stated in this Investigative Report within ten (10) calendar days. Their written response is as follows:

The County concurs with the IG recommendation included in Investigative Report 2022-0014. The Community Services Department will seek reimbursement for \$5,355.00 issued to the subject(s) named in this investigation.

RESPONSE FROM MR. SILVA

Pursuant to Article XII, Section 2-427 of the Palm Beach County Code, Antonio Silva was provided the opportunity to submit a written explanation or rebuttal to the findings as stated in this Investigative Report within ten (10) calendar days. Mr. Silva did not submit a response.

This Investigation has been conducted in accordance with the ASSOCIATION OF INSPECTORS GENERAL Principles & Quality Standards for Investigations.