

3:59 P.M.
11/15/2022
F. Day
Courtroom Deputy
U.S. District Court
Middle District of Georgia

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF GEORGIA
ALBANY DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Case No. 1:22-CR-38

v.

EDITH NATE HICKS

PLEA AGREEMENT

It is agreed by the United States of America, by and through its undersigned attorneys, and Edith Nate Hicks, hereinafter referred to as “Defendant,” and Defendant’s undersigned attorney, as follows:

(1)

Defendant acknowledges that Defendant has reviewed and discussed the Information against Defendant in this matter with Defendant’s attorney and Defendant’s attorney has explained to Defendant his understanding of the Government’s evidence.

(2)

Defendant understands that Defendant is not required to plead guilty, and that Defendant has the right to plead not guilty and to elect instead to be tried by jury. Defendant understands that at a jury trial, Defendant would enjoy a presumption of innocence, and that the United States would have the burden of proving Defendant’s guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. Defendant understands that Defendant would be entitled to the services of an attorney at all stages of such a trial. Defendant understands that Defendant would be entitled to confront and to cross-examine the United States’ proof, and to present witnesses and evidence in Defendant’s own behalf. Defendant understands that Defendant would have the right to testify in Defendant’s own behalf, but that Defendant could not be compelled to do so. Defendant has discussed these rights with

Defendant's attorney. Defendant is satisfied with the services of Defendant's attorney. Defendant knowingly and voluntarily waives Defendant's right to plead not guilty and to proceed to trial.

The United States Attorney, the Fraud Section of the Criminal Division of the Department of Justice (hereinafter "Fraud Section" and, together with the United States Attorney, the "United States"), and the Defendant understand and agree that the Court should consider its sentence in light of the advisory Federal Sentencing Guidelines, as explained in United States v. Booker, 543 U.S. 220 (2005). Defendant knowingly and voluntarily waives any further objections that Defendant may have based on Booker, Apprendi v. New Jersey, 530 U.S. 466 (2000), and their progeny. Defendant therefore agrees that at sentencing, the Court may determine any pertinent fact by a preponderance of the evidence and the Court may consider any reliable information, including hearsay. Defendant expressly waives any claim of right to an indictment, trial by jury, and/or proof beyond a reasonable doubt on any factual determinations that pertain to sentencing in this case.

(3)

Defendant being fully cognizant of Defendant's rights, and in exchange for the considerations to be made by the United States as set forth in Paragraph (4) below, agrees pursuant to Rule 11(c), Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure, as follows:

(A) The Defendant is guilty and will knowingly and voluntarily enter a plea of guilty to Count One of the Information which charges Defendant with conspiracy to commit wire fraud in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1349.

(B) That Defendant fully understands that Defendant's plea of guilty as set forth in Subparagraph (A), above, will subject Defendant on Count One to a maximum sentence of

twenty (20) years imprisonment, a maximum fine of \$250,000.00, or both, and a term of supervised release of three year(s). Defendant further acknowledges that the Court is required to impose a mandatory assessment of \$100.00 per count.

(C) The Defendant acknowledges and understands that the Court is not bound by any estimate of the probable sentencing range that Defendant may have received from Defendant's attorney, the Government, or the Probation Office. The Defendant further acknowledges and agrees that Defendant will not be allowed to withdraw Defendant's plea because Defendant has received an estimated guideline range from the Government, Defendant's attorney, or the Probation Office which is different from the guideline range computed by the Probation Office in the Presentence Investigative Report and found by the Court to be the correct guideline range.

(D) The Defendant understands fully and has discussed with Defendant's attorney that the Court will not be able to determine the appropriate guideline sentence until after a Presentence Investigative Report has been completed. The Defendant understands and has discussed with Defendant's attorney that the Defendant will have the opportunity to review the Presentence Investigative Report and challenge any facts reported therein. The Defendant understands and has discussed with Defendant's attorney that any objections or challenges by the Defendant or Defendant's attorney to the Presentence Investigative Report or the Court's rulings thereon will not be grounds for withdrawal of the plea of guilty.

(E) Defendant understands and has discussed with Defendant's attorney that after the Court determines the applicable guideline range of this case, the Court has the authority under certain circumstances to impose a sentence that is more severe or less severe than the sentence called for by the guidelines.

(F) Defendant agrees to provide a check for the mandatory assessment at the time of sentencing.

Waiver of Appeal Rights and Right of Collateral Attack:

(G) Understanding that Title 18, United States Code, Section 3742 provides for appeal by a Defendant of the sentence under certain circumstances, Defendant waives any right to appeal the imposition of sentence upon Defendant, including the right to appeal the amount of restitution imposed, if any, except in the event that the District Court imposes a sentence that exceeds the advisory guideline range as that range has been calculated by the District Court at the time of sentencing, or in the event that the District Court imposes a sentence in excess of the statutory maximum.

(H) Defendant waives any right to collaterally attack Defendant's conviction and sentence under Title 28, United States Code, Section 2255, or to bring any other collateral attack, except that Defendant shall retain the right to bring a claim of ineffective assistance of counsel. This provision shall not bar the filing of a petition for writ of habeas corpus, as permitted by Title 28, United States Code, Section 2241.

(I) Defendant waives any right to file a motion for modification of sentence, including under Title 18, United States Code, Section 3582(c)(2), except in the event of a future retroactive amendment to the sentencing guidelines which would affect Defendant's sentence.

(J) Defendant and the Government agree that nothing in this plea agreement shall affect the Government's right or obligation to appeal as set forth in 18 U.S.C. § 3742(b). If, however, the Government appeals Defendant's sentence pursuant to this statute, Defendant is released from Defendant's waiver of Defendant's right to appeal altogether.

(K) Defendant acknowledges that this waiver may result in the dismissal of any appeal or collateral attack Defendant might file challenging his/her conviction or sentence in this

case. If Defendant files a notice of appeal or collateral attack, notwithstanding this agreement, Defendant agrees that this case shall, upon motion of the Government, be remanded to the District Court to determine whether Defendant is in breach of this agreement and, if so, to permit the Government to withdraw from the plea agreement.

(L) Defendant agrees to provide complete, candid, and truthful statements to law enforcement officers regarding Defendant's involvement and the involvement of all others involved in the charges alleged in the present Information as well as any and all criminal violations about which the Defendant has knowledge or information and that such information provided will be pursuant to and covered by this agreement. The Defendant further agrees to provide complete, candid, and truthful testimony regarding such matters in any proceeding. The Defendant understands that this agreement does not require the Defendant to implicate any particular individual or individuals or to "make a case," rather it requires the Defendant to be truthful and to testify truthfully whenever called upon.

(M) Defendant and the Government stipulate and agree that there was no detected or identified biological evidence obtained during the investigation and prosecution of the matter which is subject to DNA testing. The Defendant further agrees that all evidence obtained in this investigation and prosecution may be destroyed or returned to its rightful owner.

(N) The United States and Defendant hereby agree that any breach of this agreement by the Defendant occasioned by a failure to cooperate, by withholding information, giving of false information, perjury, or failure to testify in any judicial proceeding in connection with the individuals, matters, and transactions referred to in the Information, would: (a) not relieve the Defendant of Defendant's plea of guilty; (b) permit the Government to reinstate and proceed with prosecution on any other charges arising from the matters referred to in this Information; (c)

permit the Government to instigate and proceed with the prosecution of any other offenses arising from a breach of this agreement, including perjury, false declaration, false statement, and/or obstruction of justice; and (d) permit the Government to utilize against the Defendant in any subsequent judicial proceeding any and all statements made by the Defendant. If a legitimate issue arises as to whether or not there has been a breach of this agreement, said question shall be determined by the United States District Court for the Middle District of Georgia. The burden of establishing such a breach shall be upon the United States and shall be established by a preponderance of the evidence. The Federal Rules of Evidence shall not apply in any hearing to establish such a breach, but evidence shall be admitted and excluded at the Court's discretion.

(O) The Defendant acknowledges that Rule 11(f) and Federal Rule of Evidence 408 and 410 are rules that ordinarily limit the admissibility of statements made by a defendant in the course of plea discussions. The Defendant knowingly and voluntarily waives these rights and agrees that any statements made in the course of the Defendant's guilty plea or this Plea Agreement (in part or in its entirety, at the sole discretion of the United States) and the Factual Basis will be admissible against the defendant for any purpose in any criminal or civil proceeding if the Defendant fails to enter, or attempts to withdraw, the Defendant's guilty plea, or in any post-conviction proceeding challenging the knowing or voluntary nature of the guilty plea.

(P) Defendant understands, and has fully discussed with Defendant's attorney, that concerning Count One the Court shall order total restitution in this case pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3663A and that Defendant agrees to pay the restitution ordered by the Court whether to an identifiable victim or the community. Defendant agrees that the total amount of restitution

reflected in this Plea Agreement results from Defendant's conduct as described in the Information to which the Defendant is entering a plea of guilty.

(Q) Defendant recognizes that pleading guilty could have consequences with respect to Defendant's immigration status. Under federal law, a broad range of crimes are removable offenses, including the offense to which Defendant is pleading guilty. Removal and other immigration consequences are the subject of a separate proceeding over which the District Court does not have jurisdiction. Defendant understands that no one, including Defendant's attorney, or the District Court, can predict to a certainty the effect of this conviction on Defendant's immigration status. Nevertheless, Defendant affirms that Defendant wants to plead guilty regardless of any immigration consequences that her plea may entail, even if the consequence is Defendant's automatic removal from the United States.

(R) Defendant agrees that if any restitution is ordered by the Court under 18 U.S.C. § 2259, the amount of restitution ordered by the Court shall include Defendant's total offense conduct. Defendant agrees and understands that any payment schedule imposed by the Court is without prejudice to the United States to take all actions and take all remedies available to it to collect the full amount of the restitution.

(S) Defendant agrees that the restitution, restitution judgment, payment provisions, and collection actions of this plea agreement are intended to, and will, survive Defendant, notwithstanding the abatement of any underlying criminal conviction after the execution of this agreement. Defendant further agrees that any restitution collected and/or distributed will survive him, notwithstanding the abatement of any underlying criminal conviction execution of this agreement.

(T) The restitution described above shall be paid through the Office of the Clerk of the District Court by bank or cashier's check or money order made payable to the "Clerk, United States District Court."

(U) The parties will jointly recommend that as a condition of probation or supervised release, defendant will notify the Financial Litigation Unit (FLU), United States Attorney's Office, of any interest in property obtained, directly or indirectly, including any interest obtained under any other name, or entity, including a trust, partnership or corporation after the execution of this plea agreement until the fine or restitution is paid in full.

(V) The parties will also jointly recommend that as a condition of probation or supervised release, defendant will notify the FLU, United States Attorney's Office, before defendant transfers any interest in property owned directly or indirectly by defendant, including any interest held or owned under any other name or entity, including trusts, partnerships and/or corporations.

(4)

In exchange for the consideration set forth in Paragraph (3) above, the United States agrees as follows:

(A) That it will accept the plea of guilty by Defendant as provided in Paragraph (3)(A), above, in full satisfaction of all possible federal criminal charges known to the United States at the time of Defendant's guilty plea, which might have been brought solely in this district against the Defendant.

(B) That the United States further agrees, if the Defendant cooperates truthfully and completely with the Government, including being debriefed and providing truthful testimony, at any proceeding resulting from or related to Defendant's cooperation, to make the extent of the

Defendant's cooperation known to the sentencing court. If the Defendant is not completely truthful and candid in her cooperation with the United States, she may be subject to prosecution for perjury, false statements, obstruction of justice, and/or any other applicable charge. If the cooperation is completed prior to sentencing, the United States agrees to consider whether such cooperation qualifies as "substantial assistance" pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3553(e) and/or Section 5K1.1 of the Sentencing Guidelines warranting the filing of a motion at the time of sentencing recommending a downward departure from the applicable guideline range. If the cooperation is completed subsequent to sentencing, the United States agrees to consider whether such cooperation qualifies as "substantial assistance" pursuant to Rule 35(b) of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure warranting the filing of a motion for reduction of sentence within one year of the imposition of sentence. In either case, the Defendant understands that the determination as to whether Defendant has provided "substantial assistance" rests solely with the United States. Any good faith efforts on the part of the Defendant that do not substantially assist in the investigation or prosecution of another person who has committed a crime will not result in either a motion for downward departure or a Rule 35 motion. In addition, should the Defendant fail to cooperate truthfully and completely with the United States, or if the Defendant engages in any additional criminal conduct, the Defendant shall not be entitled to consideration pursuant to this paragraph.

(C) Pursuant to Section 1B1.8 of the United States Sentencing Guidelines, the United States agrees that any self-incriminating information which was previously unknown to the United States and is provided to the United States by the Defendant in connection with Defendant's cooperation and as a result of the Defendant's plea agreement to cooperate will not be used in determining the applicable guideline range. Further, the United States agrees not to bring additional charges against the Defendant, with the exception of charges resulting from or

related to violent criminal activity, as defined in 18 U.S.C. § 924(e)(2)(B)(i), based on any information provided by the Defendant in connection with the Defendant's cooperation, which information was not known to the United States prior to said cooperation. This does not restrict the United States' use of information previously known or independently obtained for such purposes.

(D) If the Defendant affirmatively manifests an acceptance of responsibility as contemplated by the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, the United States will recommend to the Court that the Defendant receive an appropriate downward departure for such acceptance. It is entirely within the Court's discretion whether or not the Defendant would be entitled to any reduction based upon an acceptance of responsibility. The United States expressly reserves its right to furnish to the Court information, if any, showing that the Defendant has not accepted responsibility, including, but not limited to, denying her involvement, giving conflicting statements as to her involvement, or engaging in additional criminal conduct including personal use of a controlled substance.

(5)

Nothing herein limits the sentencing discretion of the Court.

(6)

This agreement constitutes the entire agreement between the Defendant and the United States, and no other promises or inducements have been made, directly or indirectly, by any agent of the United States, including any Trial Attorney, concerning any plea to be entered in this case. In addition, Defendant states that no person has, directly or indirectly, threatened or coerced Defendant to do or refrain from doing anything in connection with any aspect of this case, including entering a plea of guilty.

(7)

As an aid to this Court, the United States and the Defendant, by and through Defendant's attorney, enter into the following Stipulation of Fact. This stipulation is entered into in good faith with all parties understanding that the stipulation is not binding on the Court. Under U.S.S.G. Policy Statement Section 6B1.4(d), this Court may accept this stipulation as written or in its discretion with the aid of the Presentence Investigative Report determine the facts relevant to sentencing.

Subject to the above paragraph, the United States and the Defendant stipulate and agree that the United States could prove the following beyond a reasonable doubt:

From at least in or around December 2020 through in or around October 2022, Edith Nate Hicks ("HICKS"), participated in a conspiracy to submit false and fraudulent Unemployment Insurance ("UI") claims to the Georgia Department of Labor ("GaDOL") in order to obtain UI benefits to which she and her co-conspirators were not entitled.

HICKS was a resident of Atlanta who grew up in Cordele, GA. HICKS served as a patient care coordinator at a healthcare facility in metro Atlanta "Hospital 1" from 2003 to 2022. In this role, she had access to patients' Personally Identifiable Information ("PII") as part of her routine duties at the Liver Transplant Center. In late 2020, her niece, Tyshion Nautese Hicks ("Nautese Hicks"), solicited HICKS to see if she would steal patients' PII and provide it to her. Nautese Hicks offered to pay HICKS for the stolen PII, and HICKS agreed to sell the stolen PII of Hospital 1 patients to her niece.

HICKS knew Nautese Hicks had a criminal history associated with identity theft, and HICKS knew Nautese Hicks was soliciting the PII for a criminal purpose when she agreed to sell it to her. Nautese Hicks instructed HICKS to select patients from Hospital 1's databases with

Social Security numbers linked to the State of Georgia, to improve the chances that fraudulent UI claims would be approved by GaDOL. HICKS followed Nautese Hicks' instructions in selecting identity theft victims. HICKS accessed her employer's databases and unlawfully obtained PII from numerous patients' medical records, including names, dates of birth, and Social Security numbers, without those patients' or Hospital 1's knowledge and consent.

After HICKS began selling PII to Nautese Hicks, at least two other co-conspirators from the Cordele area reached out to HICKS via social media messages and solicited her to steal and sell PII to them as well. HICKS agreed to sell these two co-conspirators Hospital 1 patients' PII as well. HICKS provided Nautese Hicks and other co-conspirators with the names, dates of birth, and Social Security numbers of hundreds of patients from her employer's databases. In exchange for providing the PII, the defendant's co-conspirators, including Nautese Hicks, paid HICKS via Chime, Venmo, CashApp, and on at least one occasion, a pre-paid debit card registered in the stolen identity of one of Hospital 1's patients, loaded with approximately \$5,000.

HICKS' co-conspirators registered multiple fictitious companies with GaDOL through its website, or "portal." Using stolen PII, these co-conspirators then submitted false and fraudulent UI claims in the names of purported claimants whom the co-conspirators misrepresented to be eligible out-of-work employees of those fictitious companies. Nautese Hicks and other co-conspirators utilized these stolen means of identification transferred to them by HICKS to submit materially false and fraudulent UI claims to GaDOL, which relied on the information in the fraudulent claims to approve the payment of UI benefits. The fraudulent use of these means of identification caused GaDOL to issue debit cards bearing the means of identification of identity theft victims, among others, loaded with fraudulent proceeds. The conspirators caused these

debit cards to be placed in a Post Office and authorized depository for mail, and sent and delivered by the Postal Service and any private or commercial interstate carrier, to locations in and around Cordele and Vienna, Georgia. HICKS was aware that as a result of the unemployment benefits scheme, Nautese Hicks and others were obtaining large amounts of fraudulent proceeds, spending their ill-gotten gains on travel, luxury items, new homes, and lavish lifestyles. Nevertheless, HICKS continued to sell stolen PII to co-conspirators.

When HICKS was confronted by her employer in September 2022 about her unauthorized access of patient PII, she lied to human resources personnel about the nature and extent of her activities. When HICKS was approached by federal agents from the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General shortly thereafter, she alerted her co-conspirator Nautese Hicks as to the existence of the investigation and law enforcement's attempt to interview her. Nautese Hicks, in an effort to obstruct the investigation, instructed HICKS to delete their digital communications that might be incriminating to them, and HICKS did so.

According to Hospital 1's records, Hicks accessed at least 1,600 unique Hospital 1 patients' PII outside the scope of her duties. HICKS' and her co-conspirators utilized that stolen PII (and PII from other sources) to submit and cause to be submitted at least 5,000 fraudulent UI claims. This group of co-conspirators stole at least approximately \$30 million in government benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic.

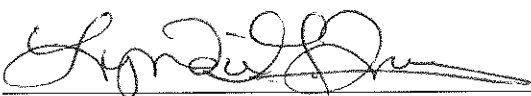
ACCEPTANCE OF PLEA AGREEMENT

Defendant understands and has fully discussed with Defendant's attorney that this agreement shall become effective only upon the Court's acceptance of this agreement and the Court's acceptance of the plea of guilty by the Defendant.

SO AGREED, this 15th day of November, 2022.

PETER D. LEARY
UNITED STATES ATTORNEY

GLENN S. LEON
CHIEF, FRAUD SECTION

BY: 
Lyndie Freeman
Matthew Kahn
Siji Moore
Trial Attorneys, Fraud Section

I, *Edith Nate Hicks*, have read this agreement and had this agreement read to me by my attorney, *Jeffrey Brickman*. I have discussed this agreement with my attorney, and I fully understand it and agree to its terms.



Edith Nate Hicks
DEFENDANT

I, *Jeffrey Brickman*, attorney for Defendant *Edith Nate Hicks*, have explained the Information and the Government's evidence received through discovery and my investigation of the charge to Defendant. I believe Defendant understands the charge against Defendant and the evidence that would be presented against Defendant at a trial. I have read this agreement, have been given a copy of it for my file, and have explained it to Defendant. To the best of my knowledge and belief, Defendant understands this agreement.



Jeffrey Brickman
ATTORNEY FOR DEFENDANT