



**ERIK NASARENKO**  
VENTURA COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
**NEWS RELEASE**



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Approved: SW  
Date: March 4, 2025  
Release No.: 25-028

## Fillmore Woman Sentenced for Defrauding COVID-19 Business Grant Programs

VENTURA, Calif. – Ventura County District Attorney Erik Nasarenko announced today that Claudia Portugal Cornejo (DOB 10/26/72), of Fillmore, was sentenced to twelve months in jail for defrauding COVID-19 relief programs and stealing more than \$101,000 from the County of Ventura, the State of California, and individual victims. An additional twenty-eight months in jail was suspended as a term of her felony probation. Cornejo pleaded guilty on October 21, 2024, to five felonies: two counts of grand theft, presentation of a fraudulent claim, false personation, and conspiracy to commit a crime.

“The defendant stole tens of thousands of dollars from taxpayers and hardworking individuals, lining her own pockets at the expense of those in real need,” District Attorney Erik Nasarenko said. “Through the hard work and investigative eye of the Sheriff’s Office and County CEO’s Office, her schemes were exposed and brought to the attention of our prosecutors.”

In June 2020, the County of Ventura launched the Business Assistance Grant (BAG) Program to support local businesses impacted by the pandemic. Over four phases, grants were awarded to eligible businesses that met specific criteria, including having a valid business license in Ventura County and proof of operation before March 17, 2020. A similar program, the California Relief Grant Program, was funded by the state.

Cornejo orchestrated a scheme to submit fraudulent applications, stealing \$70,000 from the County of Ventura and \$25,000 from the State of California. She also charged individuals upfront fees to submit applications on their behalf but never did, stealing an additional \$6,800 from two victims.

The fraud was discovered in October 2021, when the County of Ventura’s Executive Office identified suspicious documents in BAG Program applications, including forged business certificates and doctored tax forms. An investigation by the Ventura County Sheriff’s Office Major

Crimes Unit and the County CEO's Office revealed Cornejo submitted multiple fraudulent applications, often charging victims to submit the paperwork, and taking a portion of approved grants. She carried out the scheme from her business, Fillmore General Services. The County also determined that outside of the frauds perpetrated by Cornejo, the fraud was not widespread.

Senior Deputy District Attorney Howard Wise, a member of the Special Prosecutions Fraud and Technology Crimes Unit, prosecuted the case.

"It is appalling that Ms. Cornejo took advantage of programs designed to help established businesses stay open during COVID," Mr. Wise said. "However, I was deeply impressed with the earnestness which the County of Ventura investigated this matter, shut it down, and supported the prosecution."

In addition to the twelve-month jail sentence, Cornejo was ordered to pay restitution in the amount of \$92,659 to the County of Ventura for loss to the County and the costs associated with investigating the fraud. She was also ordered to pay \$25,000 to the State of California and \$6,800 to two individual victims. Those victims paid Cornejo to submit grants on their behalf but did not know Cornejo was engaged in fraud. Cornejo kept the money and did not submit the promised grant applications.

**Case:** 2022000241

**Defendant Information:**

Claudia Portugal Cornejo (DOB 10/26/72)  
Fillmore

**Charges pled guilty to:**

- (2 counts) PC 487(a) – Grand theft
- PC 72 – Presentation of fraudulent claim
- PC 529(a)(3) – False personation of another
- PC 182(a)(1) – Conspiracy to commit a crime

