

Swansea Man Sentenced to 5 Years' Imprisonment for Taking \$1.2 Million in SNAP Benefits

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EAST ST. LOUIS – A U.S. District Judge has ordered a Swansea man to repay the federal government over \$1.2 million after he admitted to using an East St. Louis market in a fraud scheme to obtain SNAP benefits.

Almahde H. Nijmeh, 65, pleaded guilty to one count of unlawful acquisition of SNAP benefits in August 2023. In addition to repaying the government, Nijmeh was sentenced to 5 years' imprisonment and 2 years' supervised release.

“Millions of Americans rely on SNAP benefits to provide nutritious food for their families, but individuals who misuse the program to commit fraud and enrich themselves are breaking federal law,” said U.S. Attorney Rachelle Aud Crowe.

The federal government funds the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to provide food benefits to low-income families.

According to court documents, Nijmeh had been disqualified from the program in the past, but re-gained admittance into the program by re-applying using the names of various family members. In his latest venture, Nijmeh used East Side Meat Market in East St. Louis to accept SNAP cards loaded with benefits in exchange for cash and other ineligible items from at least August 2017 through November 2021.

“Homeland Security Investigations is dedicated to investigating individuals who commit financial fraud and attempt to profit from government programs like SNAP,” said Acting Special Agent in Charge of HSI Kansas City. “This sentencing confirms HSI’s commitment to bringing these individuals to justice.”

According to the market’s licensing by the state, Nijmeh had put the property and the SNAP license in the names of other family members. Court documents, however, state Nijmeh was the de facto owner and operator of the business.

“This sentence serves as just punishment and notice to others who seek to defraud the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program that the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Office of Inspector General is committed to protecting the integrity of USDA’s programs. The USDA-OIG thanks the U.S. Attorney’s Office, who prosecuted the case, Homeland Security Investigations and the Illinois Department of Revenue, Criminal Investigation Division for their assistance with the investigation and helping bring Nijmeh to justice.”

Nijmeh and employees under his direction routinely purchased SNAP cards from customers in exchange for cash equal to 50% or less of the benefits. They also accepted SNAP benefits for ineligible items like alcohol and tobacco products, at times up-

charging customers for the illegal transactions. In total, the scheme unlawfully acquired \$1,239,546.79.

USDA-OIG, Homeland Security Investigations, and the Illinois Department of Revenue contributed to this criminal case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Peter T. Reed prosecuted the case.