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## *Weekly COVID-19 Oversight & Enforcement Report*

February 25, 2021

### **A. Congress**

1. On February 19, the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis held a video briefing on ensuring equity in coronavirus vaccinations. In a [press release](#), the Subcommittee identified the following takeaways from the briefing: (1) The Trump Administration’s failure to plan for vaccine distribution increased risks to vulnerable populations and jeopardized the nation’s recovery; (2) We must address barriers to vaccinations faced by communities of color, low-income communities, and rural communities; (3) Community health providers need more resources to vaccinate vulnerable communities; (4) More outreach and education is needed to combat vaccine hesitancy and misinformation in communities across the United States; (5) Inadequate data on race and ethnicity must be addressed to ensure equitable vaccine access; and (6) Briefers praised President Biden’s national vaccine strategy and called for passage of the American Rescue Plan.
2. Energy and Commerce Chair Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) and Health Subcommittee Chair Anna G. Eshoo (D-CA) [announced](#) that the subcommittee will hold a remote hearing on March 2 titled, “The Future of Telehealth: How COVID-19 is Changing the Delivery of Virtual Care.”

### **B. Executive Agencies**

1. On February 17, Acting Assistant Attorney General of DOJ’s Civil Division Brian Boynton [delivered opening remarks](#) at the Federal Bar Association’s 2021 Qui Tam Conference. He outlined six Biden Administration priorities for False Claims Act enforcement, the first of which is combatting COVID-related fraud. Mr. Boynton previewed a significant uptick in enforcement actions as DOJ begins to explore pandemic fraud under the CARES Act (specifically the Provider Relief Fund) and abuse of regulatory billing flexibilities. He also noted a focus on telehealth and scrutiny of the services being provided through remote technology.
2. In other COVID fraud news: (a) A Wisconsin man has [admitted](#) to fraudulently seeking over \$1.2 million in PPP loans by submitting multiple loan applications on behalf of eight companies and multiple co-conspirators premised on false statements about payroll and expenses. (b) A New York man has been [charged](#) with bank fraud, wire fraud, and making false statements to a financial institution after he submitted multiple fraudulent PPP loan applications on behalf of a company called Million Man LLC. (c) A Los Angeles man [pleaded guilty](#) to a federal criminal charge that he fraudulently obtained more than \$500,000 in COVID-related unemployment benefits by filing 85 unemployment-insurance claims with the California Employment Development Department.

3. The Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General [told](#) OSHA officials on Monday that it will conduct an audit of the agency's operations and efforts related to protecting workers from exposure to COVID-19. The review comes after the safety agency has been criticized by worker-safety proponents and by organized labor for its refusal to issue coronavirus-specific safety guidelines and for the relatively small size of fines imposed on businesses cited for taking inadequate precautions.

#### **C. State Attorneys General**

1. Minnesota AG Keith Ellison filed a [lawsuit](#) against an Apple Valley landlord for illegally evicting tenants in violation of a state executive order. According to AG Ellison's complaint, the landlord fraudulently claimed that the eviction was due to a need to move a family member into the unit (a lawful exemption under the order), when in fact the landlord instead sought to sell the property.
2. Missouri AG Eric Schmitt reached a [settlement](#) with Voyageurs International, Ltd., in which the travel agency agreed to refund 226 students and their families prepaid trips to Europe, which were canceled due to the pandemic's travel restrictions. Voyageur had initially retained a cancellation fee from each student, but the company now has agreed to fully refund all fees, in an amount totaling more than \$425,000. (As reported last week, Kentucky AG Daniel Cameron reached a similar [settlement](#) with Voyageurs on February 14.)
3. Vermont AG TJ Donovan filed a [lawsuit](#) against HNR Desautels LLC, a UPS Store franchisee, and its owner for violating state executive orders by failing to enforce state health and safety requirements concerning employee mask use. The action followed warnings from the AG's office regarding the company's lack of compliance.

#### **D. Special Inspector General for Pandemic Recovery (SIGPR)**

*No updates this week.*

#### **E. Pandemic Recovery Accountability Committee (PRAC)**

*No updates this week.*

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