

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024035381471 A South Florida man has been charged with bilking the Medicare system and also using his pharmacy to obtain federal loans for small businesses hurt by the coronavirus pandemic, authorities said. Carlos Belone, 37, of Coconut Creek was arrested Friday and had his first appearance in Fort Lauderdale federal court on charges of wire and healthcare fraud along with making false statements to a financial institution. Belone is expected to be granted a \$150,000 bond and will be arraigned on July 24. Neither he nor his federal public defender could be reached for comment. Belone, the owner of R&S Pharmacy in Coral Springs, is accused of submitting \$5.6 million in claims to Medicare, the federal health insurance program, for orthotic braces that were medically unnecessary or not provided, according to a criminal complaint. Investigators interviewed patients who said they did not need the orthotic braces or authorize their Medicare numbers to be used for the pharmacy's claims, the complaint says. In addition, Belone is accused of using his pharmacy to submit falsified loan applications through the Small Business Administration's Payroll Protection Program. The program offered a total of \$650 billion in SBA loans approved by Congress as part of the CARES Act after the COVID-19 pandemic struck the nation in March. The two-year loans are forgiven as long as small businesses mainly use them for covering payroll expenses as well as operational costs such as rent and utilities. According to the complaint, Belone submitted fake tax documents and fabricated profit and loss statements for his pharmacy to obtain more than \$22,000 in PPP loans. Prosecutors say he used the money to further his Medicare scheme and diverted \$12,000 to a personal bank account. The fraud case was investigated by the FBI and Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General. ——— ©2020 Miami Herald