

THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
DISTRICT *of* RHODE ISLAND

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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of Rhode Island

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, July 12, 2022

**Rhode Island Woman to Admit to Falsifying Military Service;
False Use of Military Medals; Identity Theft; and Fraudulently
Collecting More Than \$250,000 in Veteran Benefits and
Charitable Contributions**

PROVIDENCE – According to a signed plea agreement filed today in U.S. District Court in Providence, a Rhode Island woman who, it is alleged, falsely claimed to be a cancer-stricken U.S. Marine decorated with the Purple Heart and Bronze Star, and who allegedly used those claims to fraudulently gain hundreds of thousands of dollars in charitable benefits and services reserved for injured veterans, will plead guilty to charges of fraud, aggravated identity theft, forgery, and fraudulent use of medals, announced United States Attorney Zachary A. Cunha.

It is alleged that Sarah J. Cavanaugh, 31, of East Greenwich, who, a search of Defense Department records indicates never served in any branch of the U.S. military, used her position as a licensed social worker, employed by the Department of Veteran Affairs at the Rhode Island Veterans Affairs Medical Center, to gain access to documents, personal information, and medical records belonging to a Marine and an actual cancer-stricken Navy veteran. She allegedly used the information to create fraudulent documents and medical records in her name, claiming that she was an honorably-discharged Marine stricken with cancer. It is further alleged that Cavanaugh used the fraudulent documents in various schemes to obtain more than \$250,000 in cash, charitable donations, and services reserved for injured veterans.

It is further alleged that Cavanaugh, who portrayed herself as a wounded veteran who served overseas, fraudulently held herself out to be a recipient of a Purple Heart and the Bronze Star, replicas of which she purchased and publicly displayed on a U.S. Marine uniform she wore at public events.

The matter is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Ronald R. Gendron and investigated by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Police Service; and the FBI, with the assistance of the U.S. Defense Criminal Investigative Service; U.S. Naval Criminal Investigative Service; U.S. Postal Inspection Service; and Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigations.

A defendant's sentence is determined by a federal district judge after consideration of the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

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Attachment(s):

[Download Information](#)

[Download Plea Agreement](#)

Topic(s):

Financial Fraud

Identity Theft

Component(s):

[Federal Bureau of Investigation \(FBI\)](#)

[USAO - Rhode Island](#)

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