

Maryland Woman Convicted After Five-Day Trial for a Series of Fraud Schemes, Including Passport Fraud, Wire Fraud, and Bankruptcy Fraud

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Maryland

Greenbelt, Maryland – A federal jury convicted Charmaine Miesha Brown, age 45, of Lusby, Maryland, late yesterday for conspiracies to commit passport fraud and wire fraud, as well as bankruptcy fraud, and making a false statement in bankruptcy proceeding.

The guilty verdict was announced by United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Erik L. Barron; Special Agent in Charge Karen L. Brown Cleveland of the U.S. Department of the State's Diplomatic Security Service, Washington Field Office; Special Agent in Charge Colleen Lawlor of the Social Security Administration - Office of Inspector General, Philadelphia Field Division; and Inspector General Joseph V. Cuffari of the Department of Homeland Security.

As detailed in trial testimony, in January 2014, Charmaine Miesha Brown, a United States citizen, married Andrews Oduro Brown, a/k/a "Andrews Oduro," a Ghanaian national who entered the United States in May 2013. In 2021, Oduro obtained legal permanent resident status in the United States through his marriage to Brown.

According to trial testimony, including testimony from Brown, and court documents, from December 2014 through April 2021, Brown and Oduro conspired to obtain United States passports for Oduro's children, who were non-United States citizens, through false statements and fraudulent identity documents.

For example, the evidence established that on December 1, 2014, Brown submitted an application for a passport in the name of Brown's child, Child C, who is a U.S. citizen, but bearing the photograph of Oduro's child, Child A, who was born in Ghana and is not a U.S. citizen. After the application was approved, Child A traveled from Ghana to the United States using the fraudulently obtained U.S. passport. On March 16, 2015, Brown and Oduro applied for a passport in Child A's own name and

submitted a fraudulent Ghanaian birth certificate in support of the application, falsely stating that Brown was Child A's birth mother. As detailed at trial, on March 17, 2020, Brown and Oduro applied for a passport in the name of Child B, Oduro's non-U.S. citizen child, and again submitted a fraudulent Ghanaian birth certificate in support of the application, falsely stating that Brown was Child B's birth mother. After the application was approved, Child B used the fraudulently obtained U.S. passport to travel into the U.S.

Further, the evidence proved that from August 2016 through April 2021, Brown and Oduro conspired to receive payments from the state of Maryland's Child Care Scholarship Program to which they were not entitled. The Child Care Scholarship Program, formerly known as the Child Care Subsidy Program, provides reimbursement for childcare and direct payments to providers of childcare to low-income families. Brown falsely reported to the state of Maryland that a friend, Individual 1, was watching her children. Brown also falsely represented that Oduro was an "absent parent," when in fact Oduro lived in the same home. In addition, the trial evidence established that Individual 1 visited the United States in 2011 to 2012 before returning to Ghana and could not have provided the childcare services. Instead, Oduro posed as Individual 1 and obtained payments from the state of Maryland between 2016 and 2021 to provide childcare to his and Brown's own children .

Finally, according to trial testimony and court documents, on March 5, 2018, Brown and Oduro defrauded creditors and the bankruptcy trustee, by filing a fraudulent Chapter 7 bankruptcy petition in the United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of Maryland, using the name and partial social security number of Individual 1, seeking the discharge of thousands of dollars in debts and tax obligations to the state of Maryland that Oduro incurred using the name and PII of Individual 1. Court records show that Brown filled out the petition documents. On June 21, 2018, Oduro appeared at the discharge hearing in the bankruptcy court and identified himself as Individual 1, presenting a Pennsylvania identification that Brown and Oduro had fraudulently obtained in the name of Individual 1. According to court documents and evidence presented at trial, as a result of the fraudulent bankruptcy petition in the name of Individual 1, Oduro and Brown caused the entry of an order discharging debt that Oduro incurred in the name of Individual 1.

Brown faces a maximum sentence of five years in federal prison for conspiracy to commit passport fraud; a maximum of 20 years in federal prison for conspiracy to commit wire fraud; a maximum of five years in prison for bankruptcy fraud; and a maximum of five years in prison for a false statement in a federal bankruptcy proceeding. U.S. District Judge Theodore D. Chuang has scheduled sentencing for Brown on July 23, 2024.

On December 14, 2023, Andrews Oduro Brown, age 41, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit passport fraud, aggravated identity theft, and bankruptcy fraud. Judge Chuang sentenced Oduro to 28 months in federal prison, followed by three years of supervised release and ordered Oduro to pay restitution of \$127,951.22.

United States Attorney Erek L. Barron commended the State Department's Diplomatic Security Service, the Social Security Administration Office of Inspector General, and the Department of Homeland Security - Office of Inspector General for their work in the investigation. Mr. Barron thanked Assistant U.S. Attorney Coreen Mao and Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Gustavo Ruiz, who are prosecuting the federal case.

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