

# Minnesota Reformer

## About half the people indicted in Feeding Our Future fraud had other state contracts

Defense attorney says federal prosecutors are also investigating ‘adult daycare issues’

BY: [DEENA WINTER](#) - AUGUST 3, 2023 9:56 AM



U.S. Attorney Andy Luger points out all the sites across the state where federal child nutrition program funds were misused at a September 2022 press conference. Deena Winter/Minnesota Reformer

About half of the people [charged](#) by the U.S. Department of Justice with stealing hundreds of millions from a federal program to feed children during the pandemic have been paid tens of millions more in state money for services such as providing child care and assisting seniors and people with disabilities.

In the past dozen years, state agencies — largely the state Department of Human Services — have had contracts with about 30 businesses connected to 26 people charged in the Feeding Our Future scandal, according to a *Reformer* review of state records and corporate filings. Three have pleaded guilty in the federal case.

The federal investigation became public in January 2022, when the FBI raided homes and seized property to try to stop the hemorrhaging of federal money.

So far, 60 people have been charged with stealing more than \$250 million in a scheme that prosecutors say was orchestrated by a Minnesota nonprofit called Feeding Our Future — the largest pandemic-related fraud case prosecutors have brought to date.

The *Reformer's* findings raise questions about whether the fraud is more widespread than previously known — and potentially includes programs beyond just the pandemic-era food relief.

Thomas Brever, an attorney for one of the Feeding Our Future defendants, said federal officials have expanded their investigation into other areas.

“I know they’re looking at adult daycare issues,” he said.

A spokeswoman for U.S. Attorney Andrew Luger declined to comment.

Although DHS declined to provide anyone for an interview, DHS Assistant Commissioner Natasha Merz told the *Reformer* earlier this year that the department takes the Feeding Our Future scandal seriously and has worked across departments and with the DHS Office of Inspector General “to make sure that we are catching those interactions and taking appropriate action.”

After the Feeding Our Future indictments were announced, DHS officials began reviewing contracts to “take action consistent with DHS authority regarding those persons and their organizations,” according to a spokesman.

The agency issued disqualifications, license revocations and payment stops and terminations for providers, but would not provide specifics, saying it's not legally able to disclose that information under the state public records law.

“Any amount of fraud is concerning and serious, and we refer all cases of suspected fraud to the BCA,” spokesman Spenser Bickett said in an email.

Bickett said the department reviewed every person indicted and identified connections to DHS programs, but hasn't found that any person connected to Feeding Our Future has defrauded DHS programs.

Bickett said about half the people indicted in the federal case “have no record of working in current DHS-funded services,” — meaning the other half have.

Of those who have received DHS money, some haven't received any payments since before 2022, Bickett said.

Sen. Jim Abeler, R-Anoka, ranking Republican on the Senate committee that oversees DHS, said the department has improved its fraud controls since a 2019 legislative audit found the agency was inadequate in preventing and finding fraud in its child care assistance program.

“They have made a great effort to combat fraud,” he said. “They have a very robust anti-fraud department.”

Earlier this year, the Legislature passed [a bill](#) that expands the department's ability to stop payments to people who have been excluded from state and federal programs. DHS said it continues to evaluate its ability to take action, given the legislative changes, effective July 1, and “as additional information becomes available.”

In February, DHS revoked the licenses of two adult day care centers run by people indicted in the federal case, [the Star Tribune reported](#). But others continue to receive state funds.

Hamdi Hussein Omar, for example, is charged with stealing over \$1 million in federal funds, and is listed in corporate filings as manager of Care Connection Services, which received over \$129,000 this year and is budgeted to receive nearly \$39,000 next year, according to a state [database](#).

(The state website [MN Open Checkbook](#) is designed to help people see how public funds are used; data on the website sometimes contradicts numbers provided by state agencies, however.)

Sharmarke Issa is the former chairman of the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority who resigned amid federal charges alleging he used stolen federal money to buy a \$390,000 four-unit apartment complex in south Minneapolis with Abdi Nur Salah, a former aide to Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey. Salah was terminated and Issa resigned in February 2022.

Prosecutors say Issa created a company called Minnesota's Somali Community and used his position as manager of Wacan Restaurant to fraudulently obtain more than \$7.4 million in federal funds.

Issa is also listed in corporate filings as CEO of SM Adult Day Services Inc., which has received over \$1 million in DHS funds since 2020, according to Open Checkbook.

Brever, who is Issa's attorney in the federal case, said he advised his client not to speak publicly because federal prosecutors have told him about 200 more people could be charged.

Some people indicted used their DHS-licensed businesses as food distribution sites, where they claimed to be feeding implausible numbers of children during the pandemic.

Qamar Ahmed Hassan of Brooklyn Park is charged with using her restaurant and catering business, S&S Catering, to fraudulently obtain over \$18 million in federal funds. S&S participated in the federal meal program on a small scale prior to the pandemic, prosecutors say. During the pandemic, the operation scaled up, opening a site on Lake Street in Minneapolis and eventually claiming to feed over 1.2 million meals in about seven months.

Hassan also incorporated Mercy Home Healthcare, which has received over \$1 million in DHS funding since 2018, according to state records. She's listed on corporate filings for Mercy Home Care — which has received more than \$500,000 since 2019 — as well as for other businesses called Tranquility Home Health, CarePro Home Health Services, Madina Quality Care Inc. and First Children Childcare, Inc.

Some of the businesses have been separately cited by DHS for failing to comply with state regulations.

Ayan Farah Abukar is charged with falsely claiming to serve up to 5,000 children a day to get \$5.7 million in federal funds. Prosecutors allege she paid over \$330,000 in kickbacks to a Feeding Our Future employee, spent millions on real estate, including a 37-acre commercial property in Lakeville, and deposited a quarter of a million dollars towards the purchase of an aircraft to be delivered to Nairobi, Kenya.

Abukar was [given the “outstanding refugee” award](#) from the DHS resettlement program in 2021 for founding two health care clinics to serve East Africans, even though DHS revoked her child care license in 2019 for “providing false and misleading information and failure to comply with licensing laws and rules” over the course of years.

She's listed as an incorporator of Ebyan Adult Day Center and president of the nonprofit Action For East African People, which has received over \$46,000 in DHS and MNSure funds since 2021.

Kawsar Jama of Eagan was the principal of Gedo Community Services and Ahlan Childcare Center, Inc., both of which she enrolled in the federal program under the sponsorship of Feeding Our Future and another company.

Jama is charged with falsely claiming to have served about 1.46 million meals to needy children and submitting \$3.7 million in fraudulent claims for federal funds, some of which prosecutors say was spent on a Tesla Model X and an Infiniti QX56 SUV.

The Ahlan Childcare Center in Burnsville was [shut down](#) by DHS in 2019 after children were left unattended, and [closed](#) in 2021. A person named Kawsar Jama is also listed in corporate filings as the CEO of Kubra Home Care, which has been paid \$3 million by DHS since 2018.

Earlier this year, operators of small adult day care and assisted living centers — many owned by immigrants and people of color — [accused](#) DHS of targeting them with onerous new licensing regulations. One adult day center owner told lawmakers some state employees treat them like criminals. State officials said they put regulatory safeguards in place to protect seniors and people with disabilities.

More than 20 others indicted in the federal case also have state contracts, including:

- Abdiwahab Ahmed Mohamud, CEO of Minnesota Senior Center Inc., which has received \$1.4 million in DHS and pandemic relief funds since 2020, including over \$163,000 this year.
- Abdiwahab Maalim Aftin incorporated Golden Care LLC, which received over \$450,000 in DHS funds in 2021 and 2022.
- Sahra Mohamed Nur, CEO of Liban Child Care Center, which received over \$66,500 in federal funds through the state Department of Education in 2017 and 2018. Nur also incorporated Sunrise Adult Day Care Inc. in 2016.
- Abdullahe Nur Jesow incorporated [Hope Academy for Youth & Women Empowerment](#) and Hope Academy Corp. An entity called Hope Academy has received nearly \$943,000 since 2021, including over \$419,000 so far this year.
- Liban Yasin Alishire and Khadar Adan of Lakes Adult Day Care Inc., which has received nearly \$5 million in DHS funds since 2019. The adult day care's DHS license was revoked in January after [numerous licensing violations](#) dating to 2018. Alishire [pleaded guilty](#) in the federal case.
- Abdikadir Kadiye is listed as manager of Five Star Home Health Care Service LLC, which was paid over \$1.3 million by DHS from 2018 to 2021.

- Sharon Denise Ross, executive director of House of Refuge Outreach Twin Cities, which received over \$67,000 in federal funds through the state Health Department in 2022 and so far this year.
- Mefira Hussein and her husband Abduljabar Hussein are charged with falsely claiming to feed as many as 5,000 children a day through their nonprofit Shamsia Hopes to fraudulently get about \$8 million in federal funds. Abduljabar Hussein has gotten over \$1.3 million from DHS since 2018 for a daycare center, Future Scholars Childcare, and his wife received over \$68,000 in Medicaid funds from 2020 to 2022 for the Forever Friendship Adult Day Center.
- Hanna Marekegn is also listed in corporate filings for the Forever Friendship Adult Day Center Inc. Marekegn has [pleaded guilty](#) in the federal case.

All of the defendants' attorneys were contacted, but they declined to comment.

*Grace Deng contributed reporting to this story.*