

# Anderson County Man Sentenced to 13 Years for \$13M Ponzi Scheme and Cyberstalking

**COLUMBIA, S.C.** — Michael J. French, 42, of Pendleton, was sentenced to 13 years in federal prison for operating a multimillion-dollar Ponzi scheme and stalking two TikTok content creators. He was also ordered to pay more than \$14 million in restitution.

“French built his scheme on lies, stealing millions from hard-working investors to fund luxury cars and real estate,” said U.S. Attorney Bryan Stirling for the District of South Carolina. “When the fraud collapsed, he turned dangerous—harassing and threatening women, showing up at their homes, and ultimately forcing a standoff with law enforcement. This case shows just how far financial crime can go when fueled by greed and deception. Today’s sentence makes clear: if you defraud and endanger others, you will be held accountable.”

“French’s actions hurt many investors who put their trust in him,” said Kevin Moore, special agent in charge of the FBI Columbia Field Office. “Rather than honoring that trust, he exploited it to fund his own lavish lifestyle and to spiral into harassing social media content creators. The FBI remains steadfast in exposing schemes that prey on innocent people, and we will continue to protect the integrity of our financial systems by upholding the rule of law.”

Evidence put forth at the plea hearing established that French owned MJF Holdings, LLC and MJF Capital, LLC. Beginning in March 2019, through these companies, French offered promissory notes to investors that projected annual returns of 12%. He represented to investors that their funds would be used to provide loans to small businesses and that he had experience in the financial industry, including underwriting the loans in which the investor would be invested. French represented to investors that he would not receive compensation unless the promissory notes earned more than the 12% guaranteed to investors.

These were false representations. French paid previous investors with new investor monies because his investment product was not generating returns. This lulled investors into believing the product was successful, when, in fact, French was spending investor money to maintain a lavish lifestyle that included purchases of luxury and classic cars, a boat, and multiple properties. French also used investor funds to support female TikTok content creators by paying them thousands of dollars each month. The investigation revealed that at times French spent as much as \$40,000 per day on the TikTok creators.

At one point, the content creators stopped communicating with French. He became angry with the women and began harassing them through various “burner” phone numbers and fake email accounts. French claimed that he was a sniper, had killed people, and that the police could not protect them. French traveled to one woman’s home unannounced, forcing her to hide in a locked vehicle in the garage with her 2-year-old child. She called 911 as French attempted to force his way into the home. He was arrested by local police before he could reach them.

French was ultimately arrested on the federal charges after a standoff with law enforcement. French barricaded himself in a hotel room, brandished a firearm, and only surrendered after a long series of talks with FBI hostage negotiators.

United States Chief Judge Timothy M Cain sentenced French to 156 months imprisonment to be followed by three years of supervised release. French was ordered to pay \$14,750,990 in restitution.

The FBI Columbia Field Office and U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, Office of Inspector General investigated the case. Assistant United States Attorney Bill Watkins is prosecuting the case.

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