

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of Nevada

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, December 9, 2021

**Florida Man Sentenced To Prison For COVID-19 Related
Unemployment Insurance Fraud Conspiracy And Identity
Theft**

LAS VEGAS – A Florida man was sentenced today to 54 months in prison for his role in a conspiracy to possess and use California Employment Development Department (EDD) debit cards issued in other people's names.

According to court documents, during a traffic stop on September 18, 2020 in Las Vegas, officers found that Joseph Holmes Jr. (23) and co-conspirator Emelio Vladimir Rochester (25) possessed at least 17 California EDD debit cards issued in other peoples' names, and \$89,710 in cash. Holmes and Rochester had used the debit cards – without the victims' authorization – to withdraw at least \$192,234.29 in cash from ATMs in California. The debit cards had been approved for at least \$385,000 of unemployment insurance benefits.

Holmes pleaded guilty in August 2021 to one count of conspiracy to possess counterfeit and unauthorized access devices and one count of aggravated identity theft. In addition to the prison term, U.S. District Judge Andrew P. Gordon sentenced Holmes to two years of supervised release.

Co-conspirator Rochester, who was indicted in November 2021, is scheduled to make his initial court appearance in January 2022 before U.S. Magistrate Judge Daniel J. Albregts.

Acting U.S. Attorney Christopher Chiou for the District of Nevada and Special Agent in Charge Quentin Heiden of the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG), Los Angeles Region made the announcement.

This case was investigated by the DOL-OIG. Assistant U.S. Attorney Jim Fang is prosecuting the case.

On May 17, 2021, the Attorney General established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with agencies across government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. The Task Force bolsters efforts to investigate and prosecute the most culpable domestic and international criminal actors and assists agencies tasked with administering relief programs to prevent fraud by, among other methods, augmenting and incorporating existing coordination mechanisms, identifying resources and techniques to uncover fraudulent actors and their schemes, and sharing and harnessing information and insights gained from prior enforcement efforts. For more information on the Department's response to the pandemic, please visit <https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus>.

Anyone with information about allegations of attempted fraud involving COVID-19 can report it by calling the Department of Justice's National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

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Topic(s):
Coronavirus
Financial Fraud
Identity Theft

Component(s):
USAO - Nevada