

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of Nevada

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, August 20, 2021

Florida Man Pleads Guilty To Unemployment Benefits Fraud

LAS VEGAS, Nev. – A Tallahassee, Florida, man pleaded guilty today to conspiracy to use 17 victims' identities (without their consent) to unlawfully submit fraudulent unemployment insurance benefits claims, totaling at least \$385,000.

According to court documents and admissions made in court, Joseph Holmes Jr., 22, conspired with others to submit fraudulent unemployment insurance claims with the California Employment Development Department (EDD). During a traffic stop on September 18, 2020, Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department officers discovered in the car and on Holmes and co-defendant Emelio Rochester: 17 EDD debit cards, all in different names; \$89,710 in cash; five cellphones; three laptop computers; and a tablet. At least \$385,000 in unemployment benefits was approved for unemployment claims associated with the EDD debit cards, and at least \$192,234 was withdrawn using the cards.

Holmes pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to possess counterfeit and unauthorized access devices and one count of aggravated identity theft. U.S. District Judge Andrew P. Gordon scheduled sentencing for December 9, 2021. Holmes faces a total statutory maximum penalty of seven years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

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.

In May, 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 Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF web complaint form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

Topic(s):
Coronavirus
Financial Fraud
Identity Theft

Component(s):
[USAO - Nevada](#)

