

PRESS RELEASE

Gainesville man pleads guilty after fraudulently obtaining Unemployment Insurance benefits in more than 15 states

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of Georgia

GAINESVILLE, Ga. - Ronald House, who applied for unemployment insurance in his name and the names of others in multiple states during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, has pleaded guilty to a wire fraud charge.

"House ran a multi-state scam stealing benefits allotted for those in need," said U.S. Attorney Ryan K. Buchanan. "COVID-19 pandemic funds provided vital aid for citizens who qualified for them. Congress did not intend for individuals to illegally profit from the CARES Act program. House compounded his fraudulent conduct by stealing the identities of others to perpetrate his scheme."

"During the COVID-19 pandemic when so many Americans desperately needed unemployment assistance, Ronald House submitted numerous fraudulent unemployment insurance (UI) claims to multiple state workforce agencies in his own name, as well as in the names of his relatives, including a deceased family member. As a result, House collected over \$170,000 in fraudulent UI payments; benefits which were intended for individuals adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic." said Mathew Broadhurst, Special-Agent-in-Charge, Southeast Region, US. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General. "We will continue to work with our federal and state law enforcement partners to safeguard unemployment benefits programs for those who need them."

According to U.S. Attorney Buchanan, the charges and other information presented in court: The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security ("CARES") Act provided emergency assistance and health care response for individuals, families, and businesses

affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The CARES Act created a new temporary federal program called Pandemic Unemployment Assistance that provided up to 39 weeks of unemployment benefits and funding to states for administration of the program. An individual receiving these benefits might also have received a \$600 weekly benefit in federal funds under the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation program if he or she was eligible for such compensation for the week claimed.

To take advantage of the additional weekly federal benefit, House applied online for fraudulent unemployment insurance benefits using his personal identifying information in California, Colorado, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Washington State. He also applied for fraudulent unemployment insurance benefits using the personal identifying information of others in several states, including Georgia and Michigan. He fraudulently obtained more than \$150,000 in benefits.

Sentencing for House, 66, of Gainesville, Georgia, is scheduled for March 8, 2024, at 10:00 a.m., before U.S. District Judge Steve C. Jones.

This case is being investigated by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Sarah E. Klapman 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>.

For further information please contact the U.S. Attorney's Public Affairs Office at USAGAN.PressEmails@usdoj.gov or (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is <http://www.justice.gov/usao-ndga>.

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