

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of North Carolina

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, January 29, 2021

Indian Trail Man Pleads Guilty To Wire Fraud For Scheme To Defraud COVID-19 Unemployment Insurance Benefit Program

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – Joseph Ransome, 51, of Indian Trail, N.C., pleaded guilty to wire fraud today, for defrauding the COVID-19 Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefit program, announced Andrew Murray, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina.

Robert R. Wells, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Charlotte Division, and Tommy D. Coke, Inspector in Charge of the Atlanta Division of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, which oversees Charlotte, join U.S. Attorney Murray in making today's announcement.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act is a federal law enacted March 29, 2020, designed to provide emergency financial assistance, including expanded UI benefits, to millions of Americans suffering the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to plea documents and statements made in court, from March 2020 through July 2020, Ransome received UI benefits to which he was not entitled. Court documents show that Ransome applied for fraudulent UI benefits in multiple states, including in North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, and elsewhere. Ransome filed for the UI benefits based on fraudulent claims, including non-existent employment and false reason for termination. For example, Ransome falsely claimed to have been laid off from Walmart in North Carolina due to COVID, when in fact Ransome had been laid off due to misconduct. Ransome also falsely claimed prior employment at Target, BestBuy, Lowe's, and Hobby Lobby, and falsely claimed that he had been laid off from some of these companies because he had been diagnosed with COVID or due to lack of work because of the coronavirus, when he had never in fact been employed by those companies. As a result of the fraudulent scheme, during the relevant time period, Ransome applied for more than \$150,000 in fraudulent UI benefits provided under the expanded CARES Act.

Ransome appeared before U.S. Magistrate Judge David S. Cayer and pleaded guilty to wire fraud in relation to a disaster benefit. The charge carries a maximum term of 30 years in prison and a \$1,000,000 fine. A sentencing date for Ransome has not been set.

In making today's announcement, U.S. Attorney Murray commended the U.S. Postal Inspection Service and the FBI for their investigative efforts, and thanked the Atlanta Regional Office of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of the Inspector General, for their invaluable assistance.

The prosecution for the government is handled by Assistant U.S. Attorney Caryn Finley of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Charlotte.

The Department of Justice and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of North Carolina remain vigilant in detecting, investigating, and prosecuting wrongdoing related to the COVID-19 pandemic. If you think you are a victim of coronavirus fraud or have information pertaining to fraud involving COVID-19, contact the National Center for Disaster Fraud Hotline at 866-720-5721 or submit a complaint online using the [NCDF Web Complaint Form](#). Members of the public in the

Western District of North Carolina are also encouraged to call 704-344-6222 to reach their local Coronavirus Fraud Coordinator.

Topic(s):

Coronavirus
Financial Fraud

Component(s):

USAO - North Carolina, Western