

PRESS RELEASE

Albany Man Sentenced to 27 Months for Pandemic Unemployment Insurance Fraud

Monday, December 18, 2023

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of New York

ALBANY, NEW YORK – Kahleke Taylor, a/k/a “Flex,” age 23, of Albany, was sentenced today to 27 months in prison for a mail and wire fraud scheme that obtained more than \$200,000 in COVID-19 pandemic-related unemployment insurance benefits using the personal information of other people.

The announcement was made by United States Attorney Carla B. Freedman; Matthew Scarpino, Special Agent in Charge of the Buffalo Field Office of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI); Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent in Charge, Northeast Region, United States Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General (USDOL-OIG); Ketty Larco-Ward, Inspector in Charge of the Boston Division of the United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS); and New York State Inspector General Lucy Lang.

As part of his [previously entered guilty plea](#), Taylor admitted to soliciting personal information from other people on social media. He used the information to make false online unemployment insurance applications to the New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL). On one application he filed in August 2020, for example, Taylor certified that a person had lost work at a hotel in Latham, New York, in March 2020 due to “Lack of Work – COVID,” all of which was false. From September 2020 through June 2021, the applications Taylor admitted to filing as part of the fraud scheme resulted in benefits payments of \$207,004.

United States District Judge Mae A. D’Agostino also imposed a 2-year term of supervised release, to begin after Taylor is released from prison. Judge D’Agostino ordered Taylor to pay \$207,004 in restitution to the State of New York and to forfeit a \$192,731 money judgment to the United States.

Taylor's co-defendants, Taquan Parker, age 27, of Rensselaer, New York, and Olajuwon Sutherland, a/k/a "Suave," age 28, of Troy, New York, [previously pled guilty](#) to charges stemming from their roles in the scheme with Taylor. Parker was [sentenced](#) to 13 months in prison to be followed by a 3-year term of supervised release while Sutherland was sentenced to 3 years of probation.

This case was investigated by HSI, USDOL-OIG, USPIA, and the New York State Inspector General's Office, with assistance from the NYSDOL Office of Special Investigations and the Schenectady County Department of Social Services. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Joshua R. Rosenthal and Joseph S. Hartunian prosecuted 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>.

Updated December 18, 2023

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