

PRESS RELEASE

Convicted Felon Sentenced for Prison Unemployment Benefits Fraud Scheme

Wednesday, November 8, 2023

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Virginia

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. – A man who formerly resided in Newport News was sentenced today to 68 months in prison for his role to defraud the government of pandemic-related unemployment benefits.

According to court documents, from approximately May 2020 through May 2021, Reginald Prentice Phillips, 39, was incarcerated at Hampton Roads Regional Jail for striking a woman in the face and choking her three times in front of her children, in addition to shooting another victim three times because the victim reportedly owed him \$10. Phillips, a documented gang member, spearheaded a scheme with his non-incarcerated co-conspirator to fraudulently obtain federal unemployment benefits related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Phillips recruited at least 13 other inmates to provide their personal identifying information (PII) to his co-conspirator, who filed fraudulent applications for unemployment benefits on their behalf. Phillips and his co-conspirator discussed the progress of the fraudulent claims on jail calls, and Phillips would instruct his co-conspirator on where to send the unemployment benefit funds. Phillips received his share of the benefits through his commissary account. Once the commissary account reached its maximum balance, Phillips' co-conspirator deposited the funds in other inmate's accounts, who would then give the funds to Phillips.

In total, the defendant was responsible for an actual loss amount of \$210,310 from the Virginia Employment Commission on behalf of Department of Corrections inmates who were not entitled to receive unemployment benefits.

Jessica D. Aber, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, and Troy W. Springer, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Department of Labor - Office of Inspector General

(DOL-OIG), National Capital Region, made the announcement after sentencing by Senior U.S. District Judge Raymond A. Jackson.

Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Alyssa Levey-Weinstein prosecuted the case.

On May 17, 2021, Attorney General Merrick Garland established the [COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force](#), led by the Deputy Attorney General, to bring together the full resources of the federal government to bolster fraud enforcement efforts.

A copy of this press release is located on the website of the [U.S. Attorney's Office](#) for the Eastern District of Virginia. Related court documents and information are located on the website of the [District Court](#) for the Eastern District of Virginia or on [PACER](#) by searching for Case No. 4:22-cr-73.

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