

PRESS RELEASE

Corona Man Sentenced to Nearly 6 Years in Prison for Scheme that Fraudulently Obtained \$2.1 Million in COVID Jobless Benefits

Monday, October 16, 2023

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Central District of California

RIVERSIDE, California – A Riverside County man was sentenced today to 68 months in federal prison for orchestrating a scheme to obtain more than \$2.1 million in pandemic-related unemployment insurance (UI) benefits by filing fraudulent applications claiming, among other things, that the claimants were salon and barbershop workers rendered jobless by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Robert Campbell Jr., 30, of Corona, was sentenced by United States District Judge Jesus G. Bernal, who also ordered him to pay \$2,113,966 in restitution.

Campbell, this case's lead defendant, pleaded guilty on March 6 to one count of conspiracy to commit mail fraud in connection with a presidentially declared emergency and one count of mail fraud in connection with benefits connected to a presidentially declared emergency. He has been free on \$100,000 bond since his July 2022 arrest in this case.

From March 2020 to July 2021, Campbell and other co-conspirators used the personally identifiable information (PII) of others – including names, dates of birth, and Social Security numbers – to file fraudulent UI applications with the California Employment Development Department (EDD), which administers the state's unemployment insurance program.

The fraudulent UI claims were federally funded through programs authorized by Congress in response to the pandemic, including the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance and Lost Wage Assistance programs.

Many of the fraudulent claims were made on behalf of ineligible out-of-state claimants and on behalf of people ineligible for benefits because they were imprisoned, including one claimant in Texas.

The fraudulent applications falsely stated the claimants had prior annual incomes of \$42,000 and they were self-employed individuals whose jobs were adversely impacted when salons and barbershop closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The fraudulent applications listed mailing addresses with locations chosen and controlled by Campbell and his accomplices. Once the fraudulent applications were approved, debit cards were mailed to those addresses.

In total, Campbell and others caused 174 fraudulent applications to be filed with EDD, resulting in 125 fraudulent claims to be paid and resulting in total losses of approximately \$2,113,966.

Campbell is the eighth and final defendant to be sentenced in this case. The other seven defendants pleaded guilty and Judge Bernal imposed previous sentences ranging from probation and home confinement to 18 months in federal prison.

“While the nation struggled with unprecedented loss of life and social and economic disruption, [Campbell] seized upon the dislocation wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic to defraud the public of more than \$2.1 million,” prosecutors argued in a sentencing memorandum. “[Campbell] organized, led, and encouraged his coconspirators throughout, and mocked considerations of decency and honesty at every turn in his communications with them.”

The United States Department of Labor Office of Inspector General and the California Employment Development Department Investigation Division are investigating this matter. Homeland Security Investigations, the United States Postal Inspection Service, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation’s Special Services Unit, and the United States Secret Service provided substantial assistance.

Assistant United States Attorney Adam P. Schleifer of the Major Frauds Section prosecuted this case.

Anyone with information about allegations of 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>.

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