

PRESS RELEASE

Five Defendants Sentenced in Connection with Federal Unemployment Fraud

Thursday, June 15, 2023

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of Mississippi

Natchez, Miss. – Laketia Andrews Crossley, 51, of McComb was sentenced today to 13 months in federal prison and ordered to pay \$2,118 in restitution to the Mississippi Department of Employment Security for conspiring to commit wire fraud, conspiring to commit theft of public money, theft of public money, and making a false statement to a federal investigator.

According to court documents and evidence presented at trial, Crossley conspired with Sedrick Pittman, Marcus Parker, Austin Bahm, and Calveshar Isaac to receive federal unemployment insurance benefits. During the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, Pittman, Parker, Bahm, and Isaac were inmates housed at the South Mississippi Correctional Institution in the custody of the Mississippi Department of Corrections. The inmates fraudulently applied for federal unemployment insurance benefits by stating on their applications that they were able and available to immediately accept employment benefits.

Due to the overwhelming number of applications for unemployment insurance, these fraudulent applications were not immediately detected, and benefits were approved for the group of prison inmates. The unemployment insurance benefits were sent by mail on debit cards to Crossley. Crossley then converted the funds on the debit cards to funds that she transmitted to Pittman, with whom she had a long-term romantic relationship, via cell phone. When questioned about her actions by special agents of the Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG), Crossley made false statements. It is contrary to federal law to fraudulently apply for or received federal unemployment insurance benefits. It is also contrary to federal law to make false statements to a federal investigator.

While Pittman, Parker, Bahm, and Isaac all pled guilty to various charges, Crossley asserted her right to a jury trial. After a three-day trial at the federal courthouse in Natchez, a jury found Crossley guilty of all charges. The other four defendants were sentenced prior to Crossley's sentencing hearing.

Pittman received a sentence of 14 months in federal prison, which will be served consecutively to undischarged terms of imprisonment on state offenses from Pike County, Mississippi.

Parker received a sentence of six months in federal prison, which will be served consecutively to an undischarged term of imprisonment on state offenses from Pike County, Mississippi.

Bahm received a sentence of four months in federal prison, which will be served consecutively to undischarged terms of imprisonment on state offenses from Pike County, Mississippi.

Isaac received a sentence of five months in federal prison, which will be served consecutively to undischarged terms of imprisonment on state offenses from Walthall County, Mississippi and Pike County, Mississippi.

U.S. Attorney Darren J. LaMarca of the Southern District of Mississippi and Mathew Broadhurst, Special Agent in Charge for the Southeast Region of the Department of Labor Office of the Inspector General made the announcement.

The DOL-OIG investigated the case.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Kimberly T. Purdie and Charles W. Kirkham are prosecuting the case.

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