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**LAUREL MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE FRAUD
SCHEME INVOLVING MORE THAN \$1.5 MILLION IN LOSSES**

The Defendant and his Co-Conspirators Submitted over 200 Fraudulent Unemployment Insurance Claims Using the Personal Identifying Information of Victims

Baltimore, Maryland – Michael Akame Ngwese Ay Makoge, a/k/a “Hype” and “2Hype”, age 28, of Laurel, Maryland pleaded guilty yesterday to a wire fraud conspiracy and to aggravated identity theft, in relation to a Maryland and California unemployment insurance scheme totaling more than \$1.5 million.

The guilty plea was announced by United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Erek L. Barron; Postal Inspector in Charge Damon E. Wood of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service - Washington Division (USPIS); Special Agent in Charge Troy W. Springer of the National Capital Region, U.S. Department of Labor - Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG); Chief Amal E. Awad of the Anne Arundel County Police Department; Special Agent in Charge James C. Harris of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Baltimore; Colonel Roland L. Butler, Jr., Superintendent of the Maryland State Police (MSP); and Special Agent in Charge Toni M. Crosby of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) Baltimore Field Division.

According to his plea agreement, from March 2020 to October 2021, Makoge and his co-conspirators impersonated victims to submit fraudulent claims for unemployment insurance (UI) benefits in Maryland and California. As part of the scheme, Makoge and his co-conspirators obtained the birthdates, social security numbers, and other personal identifying information of numerous victims which they used to prepare and submit fraudulent applications for UI benefits. The applications contained false information, including the victims’ contact information, states of residence, and availability for work. These fraudulent applications caused financial institutions to load UI benefits onto debit cards and mail the cards to physical addresses provided and monitored by Makoge and his co-conspirators. Once Makoge and his co-conspirators received the fraudulently obtained benefits on the debit cards, they used them for cash withdrawals and other transactions for their own financial benefit.

A search at Makoge's residence on February 16, 2021, recovered 11 UI debit cards in the names of six victims from the bedroom. The investigation also revealed numerous text messages between Makoge and his co-conspirators exchanging the PII of victims and discussing the execution of the UI fraud scheme. Further, Makoge made numerous ATM withdrawals using the identities of victims, personally obtaining at least \$35,540 as a result of his participation in the scheme. In all, Makoge and his co-conspirators submitted fraudulent UI claims using the names and PII of at least 12 victims, resulting in more than \$1.6 million in losses.

Makoge faces a maximum sentence of 30 years in federal prison for the wire fraud conspiracy and a mandatory two years in federal prison, consecutive to any other sentence imposed, for aggravated identity theft. U.S. District Judge Brendan A. Hurson has scheduled sentencing for February 1, 2024, at 11:00 a.m.

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>.

United States Attorney Erik L. Barron commended the USPIS, DOL-OIG, the Anne Arundel County Police Department, HSI, MSP, and ATF, for their work in the investigation. Mr. Barron thanked the United States Marshals Service, the Prince George's County Police Department, the Montgomery County Police Department, the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Police Department and the Charles County Sheriff's Office for their assistance. Mr. Barron thanked Assistant U.S. Attorney Colleen McGuinn, who is prosecuting the federal case.

For more information on the Maryland U.S. Attorney's Office, its priorities, and resources available to help the community, please visit www.justice.gov/usao-md and <https://www.justice.gov/usao-md/community-outreach>.

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