

PRESS RELEASE

# Metro-Atlanta man pleads guilty to money laundering of COVID-19 unemployment funds

Friday, December 15, 2023

## For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of Georgia

ATLANTA - Austin Martin Siampwizi, who laundered money procured from fraudulent unemployment claims filed during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, has pleaded guilty to a charge of money laundering conspiracy.

"Criminals used the COVID-19 pandemic to financially benefit while millions of Americans were suffering," said U.S. Attorney Ryan K. Buchanan. "Money launderers, like Siampwizi, assisted others in committing underlying offenses in reaping the benefits of these crimes. Our office is devoted to bringing such individuals to justice."

"Austin Martin Siampwizi engaged in a scheme with his co-conspirators to purchase and subsequently cash hundreds of money orders that were funded with fraudulently obtained unemployment insurance (UI) benefits. The UI benefits were from fraudulent online claims submitted to the Washington Employment Security Department using the identities of identity theft victims. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to safeguard the UI system from those who exploit these benefit programs," said Mathew Broadhurst, Special Agent-in-Charge, Southeast Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General.

"This successful effort represents the U.S. Secret Service commitment to protect citizens and businesses from fraud and identity theft," said Steven R. Baisel, Special Agent in Charge, U.S. Secret Service Atlanta Field Office. "We, along with our state, local, and federal law enforcement partners will continue to investigate, arrest, and support the successful prosecution of the criminals who choose to launder illicit proceeds or commit fraud in Georgia and across the nation."

According to U.S. Attorney Buchanan, the charges and other information presented in court: The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security ("CARES") Act created a temporary federal program that provided up to 39 weeks of unemployment benefits for those unemployed as a result of the pandemic and included a provision to provide temporary benefits to individuals who had exhausted their entitlement to regular benefits or were otherwise not eligible. That temporary federal program was administered by state employment agencies.

Siampwizi laundered money procured from fraudulent unemployment claims submitted to the Employment Security Department of Washington State ("ESD"). These claims were filed using stolen personally identifiable information of more than 50 individuals. Siampwizi also admitted to submitting fraudulent Economic Injury Disaster loan and Paycheck Protection Program loan applications for his two businesses, Global Car Rental, LLC, and Global Group Development & Construction, LLC.

Sentencing for Austin Martin Siampwizi, 46, of Atlanta, Georgia, is scheduled for March 26, 2024, before U.S. District Judge William M. Ray II.

This case is being investigated by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, and the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Sarah E. Klapman is prosecuting 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>.

For further information please contact the U.S. Attorney's Public Affairs Office at [USAGAN.PressEmails@usdoj.gov](mailto:USAGAN.PressEmails@usdoj.gov) or (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is <http://www.justice.gov/usao-ndga>.

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