

Pennsylvania Man Pleads Guilty to Unemployment Insurance Fraud

Wednesday, July 5, 2023

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of New York

Conviction Follows Guilty Pleas from Four Co-Conspirators

ALBANY, NEW YORK –Thomas Brace, a/k/a “Justice,” age 62, of Altoona, Pennsylvania, pled guilty today to conspiring to defraud the New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL) by obtaining unemployment insurance benefits under the names of seven other people, including benefits funded by the federal government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The announcement was made by United States Attorney Carla B. Freedman; New York State Inspector General Lucy Lang; Matthew Scarpino, Special Agent in Charge of the Buffalo Field Office of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI); Ketty Larco-Ward, Inspector in Charge of the Boston Division of the United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS); and Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent in Charge, Northeast Region, United States Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General (USDOL-OIG).

Brace admitted that he provided Jamie Johnson with the personal identifying information of seven other people, which Johnson used to file false claims via the NYSDOL website. Brace further admitted that as a result of the seven fraudulent applications submitted by Johnson, the NYSDOL paid \$299,553 in unemployment insurance benefits. As part of his plea agreement, Brace agreed to pay \$299,553 in restitution to the State of New York. Johnson [previously pled guilty](#) to fraudulently obtaining \$701,441 in unemployment insurance benefits as part of the scheme. Brace’s two co-defendants, [Talieq Lanier](#) and [Errol Murray](#), previously pled guilty to conspiring with Johnson to defraud the NYSDOL of \$113,936 and \$69,954 in unemployment insurance benefits, respectively.

Murray faces a maximum of 20 years in prison, a fine of up to \$250,000, and a term of supervised release of up to 3 years when he is sentenced on October 26, 2023 by Senior United States District Judge Lawrence E. Kahn.

This case was investigated by the New York State Inspector General’s Office, HSI, USPIS, and USDOL-OIG, with assistance from the NYSDOL Office of Special Investigations, the Capital Region Crime Analysis Center, and the Albany County Department of Social Services. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Joshua R. Rosenthal and Joseph S. Hartunian are 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>.

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