

PRESS RELEASE

Two Georgians indicted for pandemic-related fraud

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For Immediate Release

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

ATLANTA – A federal grand jury has indicted individuals in two separate cases for fraud related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Kenneth Wilkerson was indicted for his fraudulent acquisition of several Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans and Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL) for small businesses as well as his illegal possession of multiple firearms. Jeremy Graves was indicted for filing multiple fraudulent applications for unemployment insurance benefits using victims' stolen personal identifying information.

"While communities suffered from the effects of the pandemic, the federal government worked to help small businesses and individuals avoid catastrophic economic disaster through the CARES Act," said U.S. Attorney Ryan K. Buchanan. "We will continue to investigate and prosecute those who illegally obtained these loans and work diligently to recover these funds intended to support struggling business owners and families."

Robert J. Murphy, the Special Agent in Charge of the DEA Atlanta Division stated, "No matter how much Wilkerson tried to conceal his money laundering activities behind Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) funds, this was a drug trafficking operation, generating hundreds of thousands of dollars in illicit proceeds."

"The defendant allegedly chose to illegally possess firearms," said Alisha Jones, Assistant Special Agent in Charge of ATF's Atlanta Field Division. "We will continue to pursue those who seek to circumvent the law."

"An important part of the mission of the Office of Inspector General is to investigate allegations of fraud related to unemployment insurance programs. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to aggressively investigate these types of allegations," said Mathew Broadhurst, Special Agent-in-Charge, Southeast Region, U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General.

According to U.S. Attorney Buchanan, the indictments, and other information presented in court: Kenneth Wilkerson allegedly submitted at least nine loan applications to financial institutions, authorized lenders, and the Small Business Administration that contained fraudulent information regarding gross revenues and fake employees at his various companies. He also allegedly submitted fraudulent tax forms and bank statements to support his loan applications. Wilkerson allegedly received more than \$383,000 from Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans and Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL) that he failed to spend on authorized business purposes.

Jeremy Graves allegedly used stolen identification documents to apply for and obtain unemployment insurance (UI) benefits – a program that was expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic with CARES Act funds, in multiple states, including Georgia, California, Maryland, and Nevada. In his applications, Graves listed various addresses, including his own, as the applicant’s mailing address. Debit cards loaded with UI benefits were then mailed to those addresses. Graves allegedly called the bank associated with the debit cards to activate the cards, request new cards, and make other inquiries. The individuals whose identities were stolen and used to apply for the UI benefits did not apply, or give anyone permission to apply, for UI benefits on their behalf. Graves allegedly received over \$230,000 in UI benefits to which he was not entitled.

Kenneth Wilkerson, 39, of Atlanta, Georgia, was charged in a 16-count superseding indictment with two counts of possession of a firearm by a convicted felon, two counts of bank fraud, eleven counts of wire fraud, and one count of money laundering. Wilkerson allegedly submitted fraudulent applications seeking more than \$800,000 in PPP and EIDL funds for various, seemingly defunct businesses.

Jeremy Graves, 38, of Atlanta, Georgia, was charged in a 26-count indictment with 11 counts of wire fraud, eight counts of aggravated identity theft, and seven counts of theft of government funds. Graves allegedly applied for and obtained UI benefits in multiple states using stolen identities.

Members of the public are reminded that the indictment only contains charges. The defendants are presumed innocent of the charges and it will be the government’s burden to prove the defendants’ guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial.

The Kenneth Wilkerson case is being investigated by the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

The Jeremy Graves case is being investigated by the Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Rebeca M. Ojeda and Mary Webb are prosecuting Kenneth Wilkerson. Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Diane C. Schulman is prosecuting Jeremy Graves.

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 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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