

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Northern District of New York

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Albany Woman Pleads Guilty to Unemployment Insurance Fraud

Jamie Johnson Fraudulently Obtained More Than \$700,000 in Benefits

ALBANY, NEW YORK – Jamie Johnson, age 36, of Albany, pled guilty today to conspiring to commit mail fraud and aggravated identity theft. Johnson admitted to filing false unemployment insurance applications online with the New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL) in order to fraudulently obtain \$701,441 in benefits issued in the names of other people.

The announcement was made by United States Attorney Carla B. Freedman; New York State Inspector General Lucy Lang; Matthew Scarpino, Acting 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, New York Region, United States Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General (USDOL-OIG).

United States Attorney Carla B. Freedman stated: “Jamie Johnson used stolen identities to cheat a system designed to help unemployed New Yorkers as the pandemic raged in 2020 and 2021. Johnson’s crimes ultimately did not pay – she is going to prison and she has forfeited hundreds of thousands of dollars in ill-gotten gains. Johnson’s prosecution is the result of a multi-agency initiative to pursue, stop and deter fraudsters who try to steal public funds and undermine the integrity of the unemployment insurance program.”

New York State Inspector General Lucy Lang stated: “Unemployment insurance fraud undermines the integrity of a vital government safety net, can affect victims’ ability to file legitimate claims, and puts additional strain on already struggling New York State families. Our office is grateful for the collaboration with our federal partners in working to protect vulnerable community members and good government.”

HSI Acting Special Agent in Charge Matthew Scarpino stated: “Jamie Johnson displayed a complete disregard for the law and a system designed to assist those struggling. I commend our agents and law enforcement partners on a job well done—HSI will continue to find and hold accountable those who defraud the U.S. programs designed to assist individuals in need.”

In pleading guilty, Johnson admitted to receiving personal identifying information from other people and using it to file false unemployment insurance applications in other people’s names. She then collected the resulting unemployment insurance benefits, including by driving a Maserati sport utility vehicle to Capital Region banks and withdrawing cash using debit cards tied to the benefits. The Maserati, over \$200,000 in cash, and multiple jewelry items are subject to administrative forfeiture pursuant to the plea agreement.

Johnson also agreed to pay restitution in the amount of \$701,441 to the State of New York.

The mail fraud conviction carries a maximum term of 20 years in prison, a fine of up to \$250,000, and a term of supervised release of up to 3 years. The identity theft conviction carries a mandatory term of 2 years in prison, to be imposed consecutive to any other term of imprisonment. Johnson is scheduled to be sentenced on June 22, 2022 by Senior United States District Judge Lawrence E. Kahn. A defendant's sentence is imposed by a judge based on the particular statute the defendant is charged with violating, the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other factors.

USPIS Inspector in Charge Ketty Larco-Ward stated: "The U.S. Postal Inspection Service is firmly committed to investigating individuals like Johnson who take advantage of programs designed to support individuals during times of hardship. The U.S. Postal Service has proven to be an essential service that our customers rely on, especially throughout this pandemic. We will continue to work hard to prevent any criminal misuse of the U.S. Mail and work with our law enforcement partners to put a stop to complex fraud schemes such as this."

USDOL-OIG Special Agent in Charge Jonathan Mellone stated: "Jamie Johnson used the identities of others to fraudulently obtain over \$700,000 in unemployment benefits. The Unemployment Insurance Program exists to provide needed assistance to qualified individuals who are unemployed due to no fault of their own. Fraud against the Unemployment Insurance Program distracts state workforce agencies from ensuring benefits go to individuals who are eligible to receive them. The Office of Inspector General will continue to work closely with our law enforcement partners to investigate those who exploit the Unemployment Insurance Program."

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, the Albany County Department of Social Services, and the United States Marshals Service. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney John T. Chisholm.

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>.

Topic(s):

Coronavirus
Financial Fraud
Identity Theft

Component(s):

[USAO - New York, Northern](#)