

PRESS RELEASE

Final Defendant Pleads Guilty in Federal Pandemic Fraud Unemployment Benefits Scheme

Thursday, May 22, 2025

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of Virginia

In all, 17 Defendants Stole \$341,205 Combined in Pandemic Relief Money

ABINGDON, Va. – The final defendant charged in a 17-member conspiracy that defrauded the United States, committed program fraud and mail fraud in connection with a scheme involving the filing of fraudulent claims for pandemic unemployment benefits pled guilty today in U.S. District Court in Abingdon.

Jason Dale Worley, 47, of Meadowview, Virginia, pled guilty today to filing a fraudulent claim for pandemic unemployment benefits. He will be sentenced on August 29, 2025.

Earlier this month, Crystal Shaw was sentenced to 60 months in federal prison for her role in the conspiracy. Shaw, one of the lead organizers of this conspiracy, was sentenced to the statutory maximum term of imprisonment. She was also ordered to pay \$287,459 in restitution to the Virginia Employment Commission for her role in this conspiracy.

Previously sentenced as part of the conspiracy were: Christopher Webb, 20 months; Russell Stiltner, 24 months; Jessica Lester, 19 months; Cara Camille Bailey, 19 months; Justin Meadows, 18 months; Terrence Vilacha, 18 months; Joseph Hass, 27 months; Daniel Horton, 21 months; Brian Addair, 24 months; and Stephanie Amber Barton, Hayleigh McKenzie Wolfe, Clinton Michael Altizer, and Jeramy Blake Farmer were each sentenced to 12 months and 1 day.

Jonathan Webb, the individual charged with recruiting others to file fraudulent claims, mostly inmates at local jails, was sentenced to 48 months in prison and was ordered to pay \$150,218 in restitution. Josef Brown, another incarcerated individual who recruited

others to file fraudulent claims, was sentenced to 35 months in prison and was ordered to pay \$119,660 in restitution.

All defendants were also ordered to pay restitution to the Virginia Employment Commission for the fraudulent claims.

According to court documents, between March 2020 and September 2021, Josef Brown, Jonathan Webb, and Crystal Shaw developed a scheme to file fraudulent claims and recertifications for pandemic unemployment benefits via the Virginia Employment Commission website. The scheme involved the collection of personal identification information (PII) of inmates housed at SWVRJA-Haysi and Abingdon, as well as personal friends and acquaintances of Brown, Webb, and Shaw. The conspirators used that information to file fraudulent claims and recertifications for pandemic unemployment benefits for incarcerated individuals and others who were ineligible for the benefits.

In total, the defendants stole \$341,205 in pandemic relief to which they were not entitled.

As part of the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee (PRAC) Task Force, this investigation was conducted by the Special Inspector General for Pandemic Recovery. The PRAC's 20 member Inspectors General were charged with identifying major risks that cross program and agency boundaries to detect fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement in the more than \$5 trillion in COVID-19 spending. According to the United States Department of Labor, Virginia paid approximately \$1.1 billion in fraudulent unemployment claims between April 1, 2020, and March 31, 2021.

Acting United States Attorney Zachary T. Lee, Stanley M. Meador, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Richmond Division, Syreeta Scott, Special Agent in Charge, Mid-Atlantic Region, U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG), and Virginia Attorney General Jason Miyares announced the sentences.

Agencies that assisted with this investigation included the Dickenson County Sheriff's Office, the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail Authority, the FBI, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, and the Virginia Employment Commission.

Special Assistant U.S. Attorney M. Suzanne Kerney-Quillen, a Senior Assistant Attorney General with the Virginia Attorney General's Major Crimes and Emerging Threats Section, and Assistant United States Attorney Danielle Stone are prosecuting the case for the United States.

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