

PRESS RELEASE

Florida Woman Pleads Guilty to Conspiracy to Commit Wire Fraud and Aggravated Identity Theft

Wednesday, November 13, 2024

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Maryland

Defendant and co-Conspirators submitted at least 150 fraudulent unemployment insurance applications.

Baltimore, Maryland – Tiia Woods, 46, Jacksonville, Florida, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud and aggravated identity theft in connection with an unemployment insurance scheme.

Erek L. Barron, U.S. Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced the guilty plea with Special Agent in Charge Troy W. Springer, National Capital Region, U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG), and Special Agent in Charge William J. DelBagno, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Baltimore Field Office.

According to the guilty plea, beginning in June 2020 through approximately May 2021, Woods and her co-conspirators submitted false and fraudulent Unemployment Insurance (UI) applications that contained the identity unsuspecting victims' contact information, addresses, employment status, work history, occupation, and eligibility for benefits.

Woods' fraud was facilitated by email and other internet communications when she applied for UI benefits, modified UI claims within the Maryland Department of Labor (MD-DOL) system, and checked the status of claims. In response, MD-DOL disbursed UI benefits via Bank of America (BOA) prepaid debit cards. Woods also engaged in ATM withdrawals, point-of-sale transactions, and other financial transactions, such as transfers to CashApp.

In total, Woods and her co-conspirators submitted at least 150 fraudulent applications in the names of purported claimants and identity theft victims. Through Woods' actions,

in the course of the conspiracy and scheme to defraud, the United States, MD-DOL, BOA, and multiple individuals lost at least \$3,296,725.

Through the CARES Act, small businesses are offered financial assistance — including forgivable loans for job retention and certain other expenses — through the Paycheck Protection Program, which is administered through the Small Business Administration (SBA). The SBA also offers an Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) and/or an EIDL advance to help businesses meet their financial obligations. An EIDL advance does not have to be repaid, and small businesses can receive an advance, even if they were not approved for an EIDL loan. The maximum advance amount is \$10,000.

Financial assistance offered through the CARES Act also includes expanded eligibility for UI benefits and increased UI benefits through the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program (PUA), Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC), and the Lost Wages Assistance Program (LWAP).

On Count 1, conspiracy to commit wire fraud in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1349, Woods faces a maximum of 20 years in prison followed by three years of supervised release. On Count 2, aggravated identity theft in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1028A, Woods faces a minimum two-year consecutive prison term, followed by one year of supervised release. U.S. District Judge Julie R. Rubin has scheduled sentencing for March 26, 2025, at 10 a.m.

U.S. Attorney Barron commended the DOL-OIG and FBI for their work in the investigation. Mr. Barron thanked Assistant U.S. Attorneys Evelyn Cusson and Harry Gruber, who are prosecuting the federal case. U.S. Attorney Barron also thanked Bank of America - Detection and Complex Investigations Fraud Rings and Analytics for their assistance with this matter.

The District of Maryland Strike Force is one of five strike forces established throughout the United States by the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate and prosecute COVID-19 fraud, including fraud relating to the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The CARES Act was designed to provide emergency financial assistance to Americans suffering the economic effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Strike forces focus on large-scale, multi-state pandemic relief fraud perpetrated by criminal organizations and transnational actors. The strike forces are interagency law enforcement efforts that use prosecutor-led and data-analyst-driven teams designed to identify and bring to justice those who stole pandemic relief funds.

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 more information on the Maryland U.S. Attorney's Office, its priorities, and resources available to help the community, please visit www.justice.gov/usao-md and <https://www.justice.gov/usao-md/community-outreach>.

#

Contact

Kevin Nash
USAMD.Press@usdoj.gov
410-209-4946

Updated November 13, 2024

Topic

IDENTITY THEFT

Component

[USAO - Maryland](#)