

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of New Jersey

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, September 27, 2021

Illinois Man Charged With Stealing Unemployment Insurance Benefits While Incarcerated

NEWARK, N.J. – An Illinois man was arrested today for allegedly using other individuals' personal identification information to obtain unemployment insurance benefits while he was incarcerated, Acting U.S. Attorney Rachael A. Honig announced.

Devontae Stokes, 27, of Country Club Hills, Illinois, is charged by complaint with conspiracy to commit wire fraud. He is scheduled to appear this afternoon by videoconference before U.S. Magistrate Judge Jeffrey Cole in the Northern District of Illinois.

According to documents filed in this case and statements made in court:

On March 27, 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) was signed into law. The CARES Act created a new, temporary federal unemployment insurance program called Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), which provided unemployment insurance benefits (UIB) for individuals who were not eligible for other types of unemployment (e.g., the self-employed, independent contractors, gig economy workers). The CARES Act also created a new temporary federal program called Federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (FPUC) that provided an additional weekly benefit to those eligible for PUA and regular UIBs.

Between August 2020 and November 2020, Stokes was incarcerated at FCI Fort Dix, a federal correctional institutional with an adjacent satellite camp located in Fort Dix, New Jersey. While incarcerated, Stokes and his associates caused UIB applications to be made to numerous states in the names of three victims. In response, the states provided more than \$70,000 in UIB.

The charge of conspiring to commit wire fraud is punishable by a maximum potential penalty of 20 years in prison and a fine of the greater of \$250,000, twice the gross profits to Stokes or twice the gross loss suffered to the victims of his offense.

Acting U.S. Attorney Honig credited special agents of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Jonathan Mellone, in Manhattan, New York; special agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge George M. Crouch Jr., in Newark; special agents with the Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Jason J. Molina, in Newark; and special agents of the U.S. Secret Service, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Mark McKeivitt, with the investigation leading to today's arrest. She also thanked Federal Bureau of Prisons personnel at Fort Dix for their assistance.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Andrew Kogan of the U.S. Attorney's Office Cyber Crimes Unit in Newark.

The charges and allegations contained in the complaint are merely accusations and the defendant is considered innocent unless and until proven guilty.

Attachment(s):

[Download stokes.complaint.pdf](#)

Topic(s):

Cyber Crime

Component(s):

[USAO - New Jersey](#)

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