

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Eastern District of Michigan

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, August 24, 2022

Man Pleads Guilty to Role in Stealing more than \$2.2 Million in Pandemic Assistance Benefits

DETROIT - A Detroit resident pleaded guilty today to conspiracy to commit wire fraud and mail fraud, in connection with schemes to defraud multiple state workforce agencies and the Small Business Administration out of more than \$2.2 million in Covid-19 pandemic assistance and also to defraud the U.S. Postal Service of another \$200,000, announced United States Attorney Dawn N. Ison.

Joining in the announcement were Irene Lindow, Special Agent-in-Charge, Chicago Region, U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, Special Agent-in-Charge James A. Tarasca, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Andre Martin Special Agent-in-Charge, U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General, and Rita Saenz Director of the California Employment Development Department.

Chaz Duane Shields, 34, entered his guilty pleas today, before United States District Judge Robert H. Cleland. Shields is facing up to twenty years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, and restitution of the proceeds of his fraud.

According to court records, beginning at least as early as May 2020 and continuing through at least July 2021, Shields and others agreed to commit wire fraud. Specifically, Shields and his coconspirators submitted more than 240 fraudulent unemployment insurance claims to more than 20 states and territories, fraudulently obtaining more than \$2,200,000 in benefits. Shields also successfully obtained a fraudulent \$20,833.00 Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan.

Separately, Shields admitted to defrauding the U.S. Postal Service of over \$200,000 through a scheme in which he conspired to submit more than 1,000 fraudulent insurance claims, in the names of more than 40 separate individuals. Shields and others used USPS Self-Service Kiosks to mail a number of packages. For each of the packages, the conspirators subsequently filed and received a fraudulent insurance claim by attesting that the package contained an item of significant value. In reality, the packages typically contained empty plastic picture frames with little to no value.

Cortney Saquan Shields, 33, of Detroit and Daeshawn Tamar Posey, 26, of Detroit have previously pleaded guilty connected to the case. Brittany Levett Witherspoon, 26, of Warren has also been charged in connection to the investigation.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Ryan A. Particka, Timothy J. Wyse, and Special Assistant United States Attorney Corinne M. Lambert. The investigation is being conducted jointly by agents from the Department of Labor Office of the Inspector General, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the United States Postal Service Office of the Inspector General.

Topic(s):

Coronavirus

Component(s):

[USAO - Michigan, Eastern](#)

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