

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Northern District of New York

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, September 1, 2022

Three Men Arrested in Unemployment Insurance Fraud Conspiracy

ALBANY, NEW YORK – Thomas Brace a/k/a “Justice,” age 61, of Altoona, Pennsylvania, and formerly of Albany; Taliek Lanier, age 22, of Albany; and Errol Murray, age 21, of Yonkers, New York, were arrested this week on an indictment alleging their participation in a conspiracy to defraud the New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL). The defendants allegedly conspired with Jamie Johnson, who [previously pled guilty](#) to fraudulently obtaining \$701,441 in unemployment insurance benefits under the names of other people, including benefits funded by the federal government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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).

The indictment alleges that Brace, Lanier, and Murray provided Johnson with the personal identifying information of other people, which Johnson used to file false claims via the NYSDOL website. The charges in the indictment are merely accusations. The defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

Murray was arraigned yesterday before United States Magistrate Judge Daniel J. Stewart and released with conditions pending trial. Brace also appeared yesterday before Judge Stewart and is scheduled to be arraigned tomorrow. Lanier appeared today before a federal magistrate judge in the Middle District of Pennsylvania, was released with conditions, and will be arraigned before Judge Stewart on September 7.

The defendants are charged with mail and wire fraud, as well as aggravated identity theft. The mail and wire fraud charges carry 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 charges for aggravated identity theft carry a mandatory term of 2 years in prison, to be imposed consecutive to any other term of imprisonment. 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.

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, and the Albany County Department of Social Services. 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](#)

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