

PRESS RELEASE

Two Maryland Men Indicted For Unemployment Insurance Fraud Scheme Of More Than \$1,000,000

Friday, December 20, 2024

For Immediate Release

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

Defendants Allegedly Committed Aggravated Identity Theft by Using Identities of Victims in Connection with a Scheme to Wrongfully Obtain More than \$1,000,000 in Unemployment Insurance Benefits

Baltimore, Maryland – A federal grand jury has returned an indictment charging two Maryland men on federal charges related to a scheme to fraudulently obtain more than \$1 million in unemployment insurance benefits. On February 1, 2024, a grand jury returned a sealed indictment of Daiwor Woah-Tee, age 51, of Belcamp, Maryland, and Dekwii Woah-Tee, age 46, of Rosedale, Maryland with conspiracy to commit wire fraud, and one count of aggravated identity theft, respectively, relating to a scheme to obtain more than \$1,000,000 in unemployment insurance benefits. The indictment was unsealed upon the arrest of the defendants.

The defendants had an initial appearance on December 18, 2024, in the U.S. District Court in Baltimore before U.S. Magistrate Judge Charles Austin.

The indictment was announced by Erek L. Barron, U.S. Attorney for the District of Maryland, Special Agent in Charge Troy W. Springer of the Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations for the National Capital Region (DOL-OIG), and Inspector General Dr. Joseph V. Cuffari, Department Homeland Security - Office of Inspector General (DHS-OIG).

As detailed in the indictment, unemployment insurance (“UI”) was a joint state and federal program that provided monetary benefits to eligible beneficiaries. UI payments were intended to provide temporary financial assistance to lawful workers who were unemployed through no fault of their own. Beginning in or around March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, several federal programs expanded UI eligibility

and increased UI benefits, including the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program (PUA), Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC), and the Lost Wages Assistance Program (LWAP).

In Maryland, those seeking UI benefits submitted online applications. Applicants had to answer specific questions to establish eligibility to receive UI benefits, including their name, Social Security Number (SSN), and mailing address, among other things. Applicants also had to self-certify that they met a COVID-19-related reason for being unemployed, partially employed, or unable to work. Maryland Department of Labor (MD-DOL) relied upon the information in the application to determine UI benefits eligibility. Once an application was approved, the MD-DOL typically distributed state and federal UI benefits electronically to a debit card, which claimants could use to withdraw funds and/or make purchases.

As alleged in the indictment, from March 2020 to September 2021, the defendants conspired to commit wire fraud defrauding State Workforce Agencies (SWA), including the MD-DOL, by impersonating victim individuals for the purpose of submitting fraudulent claims for unemployment insurance. The defendants used victim personal identifying information (PII), including name, date of birth, and/or SSN submit applications for UI benefits. The UI benefits obtained through the scheme was more than \$1,000,000.

If convicted, the defendants face a maximum sentence of 20 years in federal prison for wire fraud conspiracy and aggravated identity theft carries a mandatory minimum sentence of two years in prison that runs consecutive to any other sentence. Actual sentences for federal crimes are typically less than the maximum penalties. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

An indictment is not a finding of guilt. An individual charged by indictment is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty at some later criminal proceedings.

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. The 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, using 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>.

U.S. Attorney Barron commended the DOL-OIG, DHS-OIG, and IRS-CI for its work in the investigation. Mr. Barron thanked Assistant U.S. Attorney John D’Amico and Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Jared W. Murphy, who are prosecuting the federal case.

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>.

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