

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Eastern District of New York

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, February 17, 2022

11 Members and Associates of the Brooklyn-Based Woo Gang Charged with Multi-Million Dollar COVID-19 Unemployment Insurance Fraud

The Defendants Allegedly Obtained \$4.3 Million by Submitting Fraudulent Claims for Unemployment Insurance Using Hundreds of Stolen Identities

A criminal complaint was unsealed today in federal court in Brooklyn charging Romean Brown, Tyrek Clarke, Kenneth Desir, Stephan Dorminvil, Kai Heyward, Keith James, Oneal Marks, Jahriah Olivierre, Christopher Jean Pierre, Roleeke Smith and Christopher Topey with conspiracy to commit access device fraud and aggravated identity theft in connection with a scheme to obtain millions of dollars in unemployment insurance benefits funded, in whole or in part, by COVID-19 pandemic assistance programs. Eight defendants were arrested this morning in New York City and will make their initial appearances this afternoon before United States Magistrate Judge Sanket J. Bulsara. Heyward was arrested in Delaware and will make his initial appearance this afternoon in federal court in Wilmington. Brown was arrested in California and will make his initial appearance this afternoon in federal court in Los Angeles. Olivierre remains at large.

Breon Peace, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent-in-Charge, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, New York Regional Office (DOL-OIG), and Keechant L. Sewell, Commissioner, New York City Police Department (NYPD), announced the arrests and charges.

"As alleged, the defendants conspired to steal millions of dollars in pandemic-related unemployment assistance and then brazenly flaunted the proceeds of their crimes on social media," stated United States Attorney Peace. "These government programs are designed to provide financial assistance to those who are most in need during an unprecedented pandemic. This Office and its law enforcement partners will vigorously prosecute gang members and anyone else who exploits the pandemic and steals from taxpayer-funded programs."

Mr. Peace also thanked the New York State Department of Labor for its assistance during the investigation.

"The Unemployment Insurance Program exists to provide needed assistance to qualified individuals who are unemployed due to no fault of their own. Fraud against the Unemployment Insurance Program distracts state workforce agencies, like the New York State Department of Labor, from ensuring benefits go to individuals who are eligible to receive them. The Office of Inspector General will continue to work closely with our many law enforcement partners, to investigate those who exploit the Unemployment Insurance Program," stated DOL-OIG Special Agent-in-Charge Mellone.

As alleged in the complaint, the defendants are all members or associates of the Brooklyn-based Woo gang. Between March 2020 and October 2021, the defendants used the personally identifiable information of more than 800 victims to submit nearly 1,000 claims to the New York State

Department of Labor for unemployment insurance benefits funded, in whole or in part, by COVID-19 pandemic assistance programs. The defendants ultimately obtained approximately \$4.3 million in unemployment insurance after having filed for approximately \$20 million in benefits. During the period of the charged conspiracy, the defendants posted photos of themselves on social media flashing gang signs, standing in front of luxury vehicles, and holding stacks of United States currency. Several of the defendants appeared in a music video entitled “Trappin,” which was posted to YouTube on May 8, 2021. The lyrics of the song include, “Unemployment got us workin’ a lot,” a reference to the defendants’ fraudulent scheme.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress established programs and provided additional funding for unemployment insurance benefits for unemployed persons. These programs included the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), which was signed into law on March 27, 2020, and created programs for pandemic unemployment assistance and federal pandemic unemployment compensation.

The charges in the complaint are allegations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

The government’s case is being prosecuted by the Office’s Organized Crime and Gangs Section and Public Integrity Section. Assistant United States Attorneys Michael W. Gibaldi and Robert Polemeni are in charge of the prosecution.

The Defendants:

ROMEAN BROWN
Age: 23
Los Angeles, California

TYREK CLARKE
Age: 21
Miami, Florida

KENNITH DESIR
Age: 20
Brooklyn, New York

STEPHAN DORMINVIL
Age: 21
Brooklyn, New York

KAI HEYWARD
Age: 22
Brooklyn, New York

KEITH JAMES
Age: 20
Brooklyn, New York

ONEAL MARKS
Age: 20
Brooklyn, New York

JAHRIAH OLIVIERRE

Age: 22

Brooklyn, New York

CHRISTOPHER JEAN PIERRE

Age: 21

Brooklyn, New York

ROLEEKE SMITH

Age: 20

Brooklyn, New York

CHRISTOPHER TOPEY

Age: 21

Brooklyn, New York

E.D.N.Y. Docket No. 22-MJ-169

Attachment(s):

[Download woo gang complaint](#)

Topic(s):

Coronavirus

Financial Fraud

Identity Theft

Component(s):

[USAO - New York, Eastern](#)

Contact:

John Marzulli United States Attorney's Office (718) 254-6323

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