

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Eastern District of Michigan

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, September 14, 2021

Four Defendants Charged in \$2.2M Unemployment Fraud Case

DETROIT - Four defendants have been charged via criminal complaint for their roles in a large-scale Unemployment Insurance benefit fraud scheme, announced Acting United States Attorney Saima S. Mohsin.

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 Timothy Waters, 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.

The complaint charges Daeshawn Tamar Posey, 25, of Detroit; Chaz Duane Shields, 33, of Detroit; Cortney Shaquan Shields, 30, a current federal prisoner incarcerated at FCI Allenwood; and Brittany Levett Witherspoon, 25, of Warren, with mail fraud, wire fraud, aggravated identity theft, and conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud. Posey and Witherspoon were arrested today in the metro Detroit area; Chaz Shields was arrested yesterday in the Boston area; and Cortney Shields remains in the custody of the Bureau of Prisons (BOP).

According to the complaint, Posey, Chaz Shields, Cortney Shields, and Witherspoon are responsible for filing over 240 claims for fraudulent unemployment insurance benefits across at least 20 states and territories, causing more than \$725,000 in losses to the state of Michigan and more than \$1,500,000 in losses to the state of California. The complaint alleges that Posey, Chaz Shields, and Witherspoon all filed a number of claims in both their own names, and the names of numerous other individuals. All three are also alleged to have filed claims using other people's Social Security Numbers, without those individuals' authorization. Claims were also filed in Cortney Shields' name, while Shields was already in BOP custody and thus ineligible to receive benefits.

The complaint further alleges that all four individuals, including Cortney Shields, received benefits deposited into a variety of bank accounts, some connected to pre-paid debit cards. Cortney Shields also received large cash deposits from the other charged individuals into his BOP commissary account. The complaint also alleges that Cortney Shields, while in prison, exchanged messages with other coconspirators, facilitating the passing of other individuals' personally identifiable information (PII) to enable the submission of additional fraudulent UI claims.

The complaint also alleges that Posey and Chaz Shields acquired multiple luxury vehicles and purchased these vehicles with a combination of cash, and fraudulently obtained unemployment insurance benefits.

"Taxpayer money diverted into the pockets of criminals means less money going to Michiganders who need help getting through this difficult time," said Acting US Attorney Mohsin. "These arrests reflect our ongoing commitment to investigating these schemes and bringing the people who commit these crimes to justice."

"An important mission of the Office of Inspector General is to investigate allegations relating to unemployment insurance fraud. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to investigate these types of allegations," stated Irene Lindow, Special Agent-in-Charge, Chicago Region, U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General.

"The FBI and its law enforcement partners will continue to devote significant resources to prevent unemployment insurance fraud and to hold accountable those who have already stolen taxpayer dollars meant for out-of-work Americans," said Timothy Waters, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Detroit Field Office.

Special Agent-in-Charge Andre Martin, Great Lakes Area Field Office, U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General said, "Today's charges represent our commitment to work with our law enforcement partners to maintain the integrity and trust in the U.S. Postal Service and critical benefit programs."

The California Employment Development Department appreciates our strong partnership with United States Attorney Saima S. Mohsin and her team of skilled prosecutors," said EDD Director Rita Saenz. "This investigation shows the power of state and federal agencies joining forces to hold fraud suspects accountable and protect this vital safety net program for hard hit workers and their families."

A complaint is only a charge and is not evidence of guilt. Trial cannot be held on felony charges in a complaint. When the investigation is completed, a determination will be made whether to seek a felony indictment.

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.

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>.

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