

PRESS RELEASE

Baltimore Man Sentenced to Federal Prison for Role in Maryland Unemployment Insurance Scheme

Monday, March 17, 2025

For Immediate Release

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

Defendant obtained people's personal information to file false and fraudulent unemployment insurance claims.

Baltimore, Maryland – Today, U.S. District Judge Julie R. Rubin sentenced Devante Smith, 30, of Baltimore, Maryland, to 57 months in prison followed by three years of supervised release, in connection with his role in an unemployment insurance fraud scheme. Through the conspiracy, victims lost at least \$298,685.

Kelly O. Hayes, U.S. Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced the sentence with Special Agent in Charge Troy W. Springer, National Capital Region, U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG), and Special Agent in Charge William J. DelBagno of the Federal Bureau of Investigation – Baltimore Field Office.

According to the guilty plea, beginning in June of 2020, and continuing through at least May 2021, Smith engaged in a conspiracy to defraud and obtain money under fraudulent pretenses in connection with an unemployment insurance scheme. Smith obtained personal identifiable information of identity victims to fraudulently file claims for unemployment insurance with the Maryland Department of Labor (MD-DOL).

Smith and his co-conspirators used the unemployment insurance benefits, which were designated to assist persons who were unemployed or underemployed due to the COVID-19 national emergency, for their own personal use. Additionally, Smith sent co-defendant Tiia Woods, 47, of Jacksonville, Florida, text messages containing private information belonging to the identity victims such as identification cards and social security cards to use in support of the fraudulent claims for unemployment benefits.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act — a federal law enacted in March 2020 — provided emergency financial assistance to Americans suffering from the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The CARES Act authorized increased unemployment insurance (“UI”) benefits. UI benefits have historically been a state and federal program that provided monetary benefits to eligible workers. The CARES Act expanded states’ ability to provide UI benefits for many workers impacted by COVID-19, including self-employed workers or independent contractors, who would not normally be eligible for UI benefits.

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 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 Hayes commended the DOL-OIG and FBI, along with Bank of America – Detection and Complex Investigations Fraud Rings and Analytics, for their work in the investigation. Ms. Hayes also thanked Assistant U.S. Attorneys Evelyn Lombardo Cusson and Harry M. Gruber who prosecuted 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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