

Final Two Defendants Plead Guilty for Roles in Scheme that Fraudulently Obtained Over \$2 Million in COVID-19 Jobless Benefits

Monday, March 27, 2023

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Central District of California

RIVERSIDE, California – The last two defendants in an Inland Empire-based scheme in which eight people fraudulently obtained \$2.1 million in pandemic-related unemployment insurance (UI) benefits by claiming, among other things, that they were salon and barbershop workers rendered jobless by the COVID-19 pandemic pleaded guilty today to conspiracy and mail fraud charges.

All eight defendants charged by a federal grand jury in June 2022 now have admitted to participating in a scheme to submit fraudulent applications in the names of relatives, prisoners, and identity theft victims.

Keith Burns, 39, of Houston, Texas, and Regjinay Tate, 29, of Corona, each pleaded guilty today to one count of conspiracy to commit mail fraud in relation to benefits connected to a presidentially declared emergency and one count of mail fraud in relation to benefits connected to a presidentially declared emergency. The other six defendants in this case pleaded guilty over the past several weeks to the same conspiracy count and the same or similar mail fraud charges.

According to court documents, from March 2020 through July 2021, lead defendant Robert Campbell Jr., 29, of Corona, orchestrated the scheme to use the federal government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic to steal UI benefits. Campbell and his co-conspirators used the personally identifiable information (PII) of others – including names, dates of birth, and Social Security numbers – to file fraudulent UI

applications with the California Employment Development Department (EDD), which administers the state's unemployment insurance program.

The fraudulent UI claims were federally funded through programs authorized by Congress in response to the pandemic, including the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance and Lost Wage Assistance programs.

Many of the fraudulent claims were made on behalf of ineligible out-of-state claimants and on behalf of people ineligible for benefits because they were imprisoned, including one claimant in Texas.

The fraudulent applications falsely stated the claimants had prior annual incomes of \$42,000 and they were self-employed individuals whose jobs were adversely impacted when salons and barbershop closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The fraudulent applications listed mailing addresses with locations chosen and controlled by Campbell and his accomplices. Once the fraudulent applications were approved, debit cards were mailed to those addresses.

One defendant – Dillon Roberts, 31, of Eagle Point, Oregon – recruited Texas residents ineligible for California EDD benefits, including co-defendant Burns, to provide their PII to generate fraudulent EDD claims and payments in their names.

In total, Campbell and others caused 174 fraudulent applications to be filed with EDD, resulting in 125 fraudulent claims to be paid and resulting in total losses of approximately \$2,113,966.

Campbell, who pleaded guilty on March 6, is scheduled to be sentenced on June 5 by United States District Judge Jesus G. Bernal. The other seven defendants are scheduled to be sentenced in the coming months, including sentencing hearings scheduled for June 26 for Burns and Tate.

As a result of their guilty pleas, each of the eight defendants faces statutory maximum sentences of 30 years in federal prison for the conspiracy count and 30 years in federal prison for the mail fraud charges.

The United States Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General and the California Employment Development Department – Investigation Division are investigating this matter. Homeland Security Investigations, the United States Postal Inspection Service, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's Special Services Unit, and the United States Secret Service provided substantial assistance.

Assistant United States Attorney Adam P. Schleifer of the Major Frauds Section is prosecuting this case.

Anyone with information about allegations of fraud involving COVID-19 can report it by calling the Department of Justice's National Center for Disaster Fraud 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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