

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Eastern District of Virginia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, November 8, 2022

Fredericksburg Man Pleads Guilty to Pandemic Unemployment Fraud Scheme

ALEXANDRIA, Va. – A Fredericksburg man pleaded guilty yesterday to conspiring to obtain pandemic unemployment benefits. His family members were also indicted for their roles in the scheme, along with a separate mail theft and bank fraud scheme.

According to court documents, from in or about May 2020 through in or about January 2022, Eric Wilhoit, II, 28, conspired with his siblings, Odyssey Wilhoit, 23, and Jeremiah Wilhoit, 26, and cousin, Dejhaun Wilhoit, 26, to obtain pandemic unemployment benefits. Yesterday, Eric Wilhoit pleaded guilty and admitted that he applied for pandemic unemployment benefits in his name and in the names of others, many who were identity theft victims. He also admitted that he falsely represented, among other things, the applicants' work history and that they lost their employment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of yesterday's plea, Eric Wilhoit admitted that he instructed his coconspirators on how to make the claims and used VPNs and false or anonymized email addresses in an attempt to hide the fraud. Additionally, he admitted that he recruited others so as to use their physical addresses to receive the prepaid debit cards that contained the unemployment benefits. Eric Wilhoit admitted that he and his coconspirators made significant cash withdrawals and bought luxury goods with the benefits. Specifically, Eric Wilhoit purchased a diamond ring among other things. Eric Wilhoit admitted that the associated loss was somewhere between \$550,000 and \$3,500,000.

While attempting to flee his arrest, Eric Wilhoit led law enforcement on a high-speed chase, resulting in him crashing his car with his minor children in the backseat.

In addition to alleging that Odyssey Wilhoit, Jeremiah Wilhoit, and Dejhaun Wilhoit engaged in this pandemic unemployment benefits scheme, the indictment also alleges Odyssey Wilhoit conspired with Jaleai Morrison, 23, of Temple, Georgia, in a separate mail theft and bank fraud scheme. Morrison pleaded guilty on November 7 to participating in this scheme. According to court documents, Morrison would steal checks from a U.S. postal collection box and provide the checks or personal information from the checks to Odyssey Wilhoit. Odyssey Wilhoit then allegedly used the information to create counterfeit checks, which she would then deposit into bank accounts. After her conspiracy with Morrison ended, it is alleged that Odyssey Wilhoit continued her bank fraud scheme through at least July 2022.

Eric Wilhoit and Morrison are scheduled to be sentenced on January 25, 2023. Eric Wilhoit faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison. Morrison faces a maximum penalty of 30 years in prison. If convicted, Odyssey Wilhoit, Jeremiah Wilhoit, and Dejhaun Wilhoit face a mandatory minimum of 2 years and maximum penalty of 30 years. Actual sentences for federal crimes are typically less than the maximum penalties. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after taking into account the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Jessica D. Aber, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia; Wayne A. Jacobs, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI Washington Field Office Criminal Division; Kevin Davis, Fairfax County Chief of

Police; Damon E. Wood, Inspector in Charge of the Washington Division of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service; and Troy Springer, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the Washington, DC Regional Office, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, made the announcement after U.S. District Judge Anthony J. Trenga accepted the plea.

The Charles County Sheriff's Office and Virginia State Police provided assistance in this case.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Kimberly Shartar and Christopher Hood are prosecuting the case.

A copy of this press release is located on the website of the [U.S. Attorney's Office](#) for the Eastern District of Virginia. Related court documents and information are located on the website of the [District Court](#) for the Eastern District of Virginia or on [PACER](#) by searching for Case No. 1:22-cr-191.

An indictment is merely an accusation. Odyssey Wilhoit, Jeremiah Wilhoit, and Dejhaun Wilhoit are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

Topic(s):

Coronavirus
Financial Fraud

Component(s):

[Federal Bureau of Investigation \(FBI\)](#)
[USAO - Virginia, Eastern](#)

Contact:

USAVAE.Press@usdoj.gov

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