

PRESS RELEASE

Maryland Man Sentenced to More Than Seven Years in Federal Prison for Unemployment Insurance Benefits Scheme During COVID-19 Pandemic

Friday, April 4, 2025

For Immediate Release

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

Greenbelt, Maryland – U.S. District Judge Lydia Kay Griggsby sentenced Michael Cooley, Jr., aka “Micheal Cooley Jr.,” “5Micmusik,” and “Michael White,” 26, of Prince George’s County, Maryland, to 87 months in federal prison. In January 2025, Cooley pled guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud and aggravated identity theft, in connection with a conspiracy and scheme to defraud the Maryland Department of Labor and California Employment Development Department.

Kelly O. Hayes, U.S. Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced the sentencing 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 Kareem A. Carter, Internal Revenue Service – Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI), Washington, D.C. Field Office.

According to the guilty plea, from at least June 2020 through March 2021, Cooley conspired with Isiah Lewis, 35, of Prince George’s County, and Alonzo Brown, 27, of Virginia, to devise and execute a scheme to defraud individuals and multiple state workforce agencies, including in Maryland and California, of more than \$800,000 in unemployment insurance (UI) benefits, successfully obtaining more than \$300,000. The scheme was sophisticated and used personal identifiable information — such as name, date of birth, and social security number — from more than 60 individuals to file online UI applications in Maryland and California, using anonymous email addresses to obscure their identities and avoid detection.

At sentencing, Judge Griggsby found that Cooley held a managerial role in the conspiracy. Additionally, Judge Griggsby ordered Cooley to pay restitution of

\$310,428.08 to the victims and to forfeit all money, property, and/or assets derived from the scheme, including a money judgment of \$310,428.08.

This case is part of the District of Maryland COVID-19 Strike Force, a Strike Force that 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 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (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 about the Department's response to the pandemic, 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 IRS-CI for their work in the investigation. Ms. Hayes also thanked Assistant U.S. Attorney Bijon A. Mostoufi, who prosecuted the federal case, and Joanna B.N. Huber, who supported the case.

For more information about the Maryland U.S. Attorney's Office, its priorities, and resources available to report fraud, please visit www.justice.gov/usao-md and <https://www.justice.gov/usao-md/report-fraud>.

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Contact

Kevin Nash
USAMD.Press@usdoj.gov
410-209-4946

Updated April 4, 2025

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